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The Night-Hawk Detective; Or, Trapping the Tigers in New York.

BY CAPTAIN HOWARD HOLMES,

AUTHOR OF "THE DARK LANTERN DETECTIVE," "THE NEVER-FAIL DETECTIVE," "CAPTAIN HERCULES," ETC., ETC.



FOR SEVERAL MOMENTS NICKUM NOX, THE MAGIC CHEMIST, LOOKED AT THE BRAND.

The Night-Hawk Detective;

OR,

Trapping the Tigers in New York.

The Last of the Branded Band

BY CAPT. HOWARD HOLMES,
AUTHOR OF "SILK RIBBON'S CRUSH-OUT,"
"CAPTAIN COLDGRIP" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAD FARE.

The lamps of Union Square were lighted again.

Here and there people lolled on the benches, while on the sidewalk ebbed and flowed the tide of city humanity.

There was nothing to break the monotony of the night in this favorite part of New York, and the cabbies waiting for customers with glances toward the hotels in the immediate vicinity, seemed to give up in despair.

One of the men was an old hand at the business, and while he leaned against the front wheel of his vehicle he looked like a statue in bronze.

Everybody knew Jack Horrox and it would almost be safe to say that he returned the compliment by knowing everybody.

Horrox had handled the whip for years and there was not a corner in New York which he had not penetrated with his cab, that is if it was penetrable.

On this particular night Jack yawned with the rest of the cabbies, for fares were scarce, and despite the heat everybody seemed determined to walk.

All at once Jack found a woman at his elbow, and as he stepped aside politely to let her enter the cab his arm was touched and he leaned toward the prospective fare.

She was a good-looking person of perhaps thirty, with a white and striking face, and the eyes, Jack thought at the time, as he recalled them often after that night, had a strange, unnatural light.

But he had carried many strange fares in his time, so why should he wonder at this one?

He held open the door and the woman seemed to hesitate as she placed her foot on the step.

"Which way?" said Jack.

In another moment she was inside and had fallen back in the seat.

"No. — Grand street, near Broadway, you know."

It did not take the agile cabby long to mount to the box and in a little while the vehicle was storming away, for Jack thought he had detected a good deal of eagerness in the woman's eyes.

The cab rattled over the stones of New York, and Jack, in order to save time, took the nearest cut to Grand and ere long pulled into that thoroughfare.

He sprang from the box and opened the door for his fare.

"Take me back!" almost yelled the woman, as she darted forward and sunk her fingers into the cabman's arm. "Not here for the world! For heaven's sake take me back!"

Jack Horrox looked at his fare amazed.

"You wanted me to fetch you here," he said.

"No, no! Take me back! They are after me now and I must get away."

"Back to Union Square?"

"Back! back!" cried the woman, as her eyes blazed. "I must go back to where you found me."

"All right!" and the man climbed back to his seat on the cab. "I will drive you to Halifax if you have the fare, madam."

Back went the cab.

Jack heard no more of the woman inside.

Every now and then he would lean down toward the window and listen; but all was still in the vehicle.

"I guess I had better take her to the insane asylum," he said to himself. "She seems to be as mad as a March hare."

As fast as the horses could take them back to Union Square it was done and Jack opened the door for his fare to alight.

She looked around, dazed like, when she

stepped out and drew forth a pocketbook which she extended.

"Take what is yours and let me go. They must not find me this night."

Jack took his fare and returned the purse, after which the woman, with another frightened look about her, vanished almost immediately.

"That beats my time," said the cabman. "The woman is mad—no doubt of that; imagines that she is chased, when perhaps she hasn't an enemy in the world."

Jack Horrox was about to resume his waiting attitude when he saw that the door of the cab had been left open.

When he went to close it he discovered lying on the floor of the cab a bit of paper which might have been dropped by his wild passenger.

With some curiosity he picked it up and leaving the cab for a moment, he entered the Union Square Hotel to read it.

No one seemed to notice the driver and as he approached the counter with the paper in his hand, he wondered what he had found.

Jack was not a very good decipherer of writing and the note puzzled him from the start.

It looked like one which had been written either by a mad person, or while the cab was jolting over the streets.

The sentences appeared cramped and broken in places, and the man almost swore to himself while he looked at it.

"Hang it all!" he cried, "why couldn't she have written in some language which a fellow like me could make out. This looks like Chinese or some outlandish writing and I have a notion to throw it away."

But he kept at the job and at last made it out as follows:

"JASPER JOYCE:—

"You told me once to come to you in the day of my trouble. That time has come. I am pursued by dangers seen and unseen, and remembering your words, I come to you. For fear I will not find you at home, I scrawl this in the cab to leave at your room. They have found Miles Maccoon at last. He is dead—murdered! and I hold the secret of the strange crime. They will not let me rest until they have found me. If you will come to my rooms I will tell you and put you on the trail, for I am the only person outside—"

The writing stopped right there, and Jack turned the paper over as if he expected to find the rest of it on the other side.

"Maybe she got out of her head here, if she was in it at all," said he with a smile. "She seemed all right when she came to me for the ride; but the moment I opened the door on Grand street I saw that I had a mad-woman to deal with. Jasper Joyce, eh? Why, that's the detective I want, as they call him—or the Night-Hawk Detective—the man who got to the bottom of the river mystery last fall. She started to see him, but she changed her mind, or went crazy before she got there, and made me take her back to Union Square. What's the matter with me delivering this half-finished note to the Night-Hawk?"

He put the letter in his pocket and went out.

"I'll do it! It says that some one's been murdered, and that the murderers are after the woman. That may all be a crazy notion of hers; but I'll let Joyce do what he pleases with the matter."

He mounted to the seat, this time without a passenger of any kind, and in another moment was driving off.

He drove back over the old route, thinking of the strange adventure of the night, and when he pulled up in front of the number which the woman had given him, he jumped down and entered the open door.

Probably Jack had driven other people to the rooms of the city ferret, for he ran up a flight of steps and rapped at a door in the shadows.

When it was opened he found himself face to face with a good-looking man of thirty-five who invited him inside.

Jack walked across the threshold with an air of importance and took a seat at the little table on which was a drop-light that afforded the light needed for the room.

"This is my second trip to your number," observed the cabman, with a smile. "I was here awhile ago with a passenger who

seemed to want to see you; but she changed her notion in a jiffy, and I had to drive her back. I guess she got out of her head all at once, for when I started with her she seemed all O. K.; but when I landed her she was as mad as a March hare."

The man who listened to the cabby was a person whose face betrayed nothing.

He had a reputation which went far beyond the limits of Gotham, and every one who knew anything about detectives and their ways knew that none stood ahead of Jasper Joyce the Night-Hawk, as a mystery-sifter, an unraveler of anything dark and very intricate, and a veritable Javert on the trail of crime.

His quiet little quarters on Grand, near Broadway, had become noted of late years, and while he could tell a great many secrets and show up many skeletons that lay in certain closets, he kept his own counsels, so that there was one detective at least whose memoirs would never see the light.

Jack Horrox as he spoke, ran his hand into his pocket and drew out the crumpled note.

"She didn't finish it somehow," said he, looking up at the ferret, "I think she got out of her head so suddenly that she threw it away, for I found it on the floor of the cab after I had dismissed her."

The Night-Hawk took the bit of paper and bent forward as he unfolded it.

He read it through without a sign of astonishment. He was accustomed to the strange and mysterious, and while Jack watched him in search of something that would tell him that the detective had found another puzzle, the face seemed to clear and a smile came to the ferret's lips.

"What did she look like?" he asked.

"She wasn't a bad looker," answered the cabman. "She was dressed in black and had a veil on which she kept down only when she came up to me the first time. She might have been a woman of thirty, though women nowadays keep their age so well, you see."

"Was she nervous?"

"Didn't seem to be till she begged to be taken back. Then she seemed to be another person. She was all nerves then."

Jasper Joyce looked at the paper again.

"Of course," said Jack, "I didn't try to follow her when she whisked away after settling her fare. I let her go."

"Which way did she go?"

"She went toward Fourteenth street."

"Vanished in a little while, eh?"

"Like a ghost, as it seemed to me. She was as quick of foot and almost as agile as a deer."

"I guess that's all," said the Night-Hawk, laying the letter down upon the table. "If you should see her again will you tell me, Mr. Horrox?"

"I will," promised Jack; "and if she gets into my back again I'll drive her to you, whether she wants to come here or not."

"Do so," smiled the detective. "That is just what I want you to do. You've wasted some time and have been away from your station," and a bill slipped across the table to be picked up by the cabman with a bow.

Joyce waited till the heavy boots of the man had gone down his stairs, when he rose and unlocked a desk on the other side of the room.

He took from its recesses a lot of note-books and with them came back to the table.

"She must be rattled, sure enough," said he, aloud. "No one's been killed that I know of and if the boys had news of another mystery, I guess Chatters wouldn't keep me in the dark very long. So I promised to help this woman when she got into trouble, did I? Let me see."

He sat down, drawing the drop-light closer to him and began to go through the note-books with the greatest care.

One after another he went over, now and then looking up as the task seemed endless.

"This may be it," he said, and then he read half aloud, for he was only listener:

"June 10th, 1888, Mem: Called on by a woman who gave her name as Zira; would tell nothing more about herself. Tall, good-looking and about twenty-six. Black eyes and hair, white face, with a foreign cast. Told me a tale about a secret league whose members are branded on the back with a 'D.'

Acted strange, but to get rid of her, I promised to befriend her as against the League whenever she came to me for help."

He turned another leaf in the note-book and read again:

"Tried to find out something about 'Zira' to-day. She lives at No. — West 14th. Rooms on third floor, has been there about three years. No one knows anything about her; said to be queer, but harmless."

"So she wants help now. Was on her way to me when she suddenly changes her mind. Acts like a wild person. Tells Jack Horrox that 'Miles Maccoon' has been murdered. Who is 'Miles Maccoon'?"

The Night-Hawk looked up as the door opened and a man stood before him.

"I guess I've got another one for you," said this person with a bow as he doffed a slouched hat.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT NICKUM NOX KNEW.

A VERY queer specimen of humanity was the person who had presented himself at the detective's door.

In height he was five-feet-seven and his face was as tanned as a sailor's. As he came in it was noticeable that he had a shuffling gait; indeed one foot seemed to drag; but the moment he halted before Jasper Joyce at the table his figure seemed to straighten and to increase an inch in stature.

"So you have something for me, eh, Nickum?" repeated the detective.

"It looks like something to me anyhow," was the reply. "Don't know how it will appear to you, of course. Got something on hand I see?" and the speaker's gaze fell upon the note-books which the Night-Hawk had fetched from their hiding-place in the desk.

"It's not so important that I can't leave it to listen to you," was the reply, and the detective pushed the note-books aside and began to listen while the little man talked.

"Do you know Gorell Grimm?"

"A great many people know him, Nickum. You mean the man who lives in the odd looking house on Eighth avenue?"

"There's only one Gorell Grimm, or at least there used to be but one."

"What has happened to him?"

"A good deal that concerns him just now. He's dead!"

"Oh! is he? When did he die?"

"Can't tell that. I didn't get into the house to find out the particulars; but he died all the same."

"At home?"

"Yes; he's done them the service to die in his own house, which is better than to be found dead in the river, or on the streets. Now, there's something for you about this."

"For me?"

Old Nickum who, for years, had been of a great deal of service to the Gotham Javert, seemed to lean across the table, and his head, lying between his arms, he presented a grotesque appearance. His eyes seemed to change color as he watched Joyce a moment, and then one of his sunburned hands stole out like the head of a snake.

"See here, Jasper: I have a sneaking suspicion that this same Gorell Grimm was helped out of the world."

"Murdered, do you mean?"

"Something like it," was the answer.

"You see, they wouldn't let me into the house, not for the world, and then I wouldn't care to be nosing round there and make the grief of the young lady left behind deeper than it is now; but, hang it all, when a man bears one name at home and perhaps another beyond his doorstep, things don't look all right, eh?"

"Did Gorell Grimm do this?"

"It looks that way to me."

The old man took from his pocket the stub of a pencil, and the next moment had pulled toward him the letter from the mad woman, and had traced a name upon the back of the little sheet.

The Night-Hawk looked at what the man had written:

"Miles Maccoon!"

It was the same name which appeared

in the woman's letter, and it caused him to study the name for a moment.

"What do you know about Gorell Grimm, as Miles Maccoon?" asked the detective.

"Not much. I only know that Gorell Grimm is dead—dead this minute in the odd looking house on Eighth avenue, and that in some places he was Miles Maccoon."

"You've been inquiring into this man's business; and the crime-trailer looked sharply at the man he addressed. "Come, Nickum, you will have to tell me more about this man. Dead, is he? Now, what if I were to tell you that I have already received notice that Miles Maccoon has been murdered."

"That wouldn't be very strange; you get all the news in quick time."

"Now and then you bring me some; but this time, old boy, you are a few minutes late."

"Who beat me? Tell me that," and the old man's face grew resentful. "Tell me, Night-Hawk, who got ahead of me this time, and I will see that I am not distanced again."

"There is right where the puzzle lies, Nickum. I don't know to whom I am indebted for the news, but it is here all the same. It came to me in a mysterious manner. A woman started with it, but she got wild on the way and went back without delivering it."

"Got wild, you say?"

"Yes, lost her mind suddenly, as it were."

Nickum leaned back in his chair and for half a minute stared at the detective.

"Then, how did you get the news at all?"

"By this."

The bit of paper upon which he had written the name of Miles Maccoon was pushed across the table, and the dark hands of Mr. Nox pounced upon it like a hawk.

He read it slowly for he was not good at deciphering poor writing, and when he handed it back his face was a study.

"It looks like the work of a crazy woman," said he. "What was she like, Jasper?"

"I didn't see her."

"But you remember her, of course."

"My note-books have been refreshing my memory a little."

"She says that at one time you promised to help her if she ever got into trouble."

"I see she does."

"Well, does the note-book tell you anything about her?"

"Not much."

"She might have signed this letter if she hadn't lost her head?"

"Perhaps."

"How did she come to your home and how do you know that she got rattled all of a sudden?"

This question drew from the detective the whole story about Jack Horrox's passenger, as he knew it from the cabman's narrative, and he was listened to by Nickum Nox with a good deal of interest.

"So you've lost her?" said the old man, sadly.

"It looks so."

"If she is really mad and imagines that the people who are responsible for Miles Maccoon's death are after her, why, she may have gone to the river. It spoils a good clue, Jasper, but what are you going to do about it?"

"What can we do, Nickum?"

The veteran left the chair and began to walk the floor with his hands buried in the depths of his pockets.

His shuffling gait caused the Night-Hawk to watch him, as he had seen him in this same reverie before, and it was some time before the little old man stopped.

"A mad woman wouldn't be apt to give us a good clue," said he, stopping suddenly as he turned toward the table. "If she knows anything about the murder—saying, of course, that Miles Maccoon, or Gorell Grimm, has been killed—she isn't in fit condition to help us much. You know what a time we had with the mad man last winter when we were sifting out the Marlay matter? You can't tie to people with wheels in their heads. I guess we'll have to tackle this mystery and let the woman go."

The intimacy which existed between the detective and the old man was of such a

nature as to let the latter express his opinions as though he was the ferret and not the queer individual of street and gutter.

"Perhaps we shall," said Joyce. "You know, Nickum, that I have received no news of Gorell Grimm's death save what you and this unknown creature have told me. We will get the papers to-morrow and then—"

"They will say that he died of heart disease or something of the kind. He has been ailing of late—"

"You know that, do you?"

"Why, yes."

"But still you say that he has been murdered."

"I say so," and the little figure straightened. "I am here to say that no matter what the papers say about Gorell Grimm, or what the young girl, Minon, says, he has been helped out of the world with something or other which nature had nothing to do with. But what does that page of your note-book say, Jasper?"

"I was trying to find out something about the woman—when she called on me and so on?"

"And you have discovered something?"

"Not much."

"But something and very little is much to you. You can wait till you have been 'officially notified,' or you can take the trail now on what you have learned—just as you like."

The Night-Hawk saw his visitor depart and again he was left alone.

Picking up the note-books that littered the table he threw them back into the desk and locked it.

"Two names and a double life," he muttered. "Miles Maccoon and Gorell Grimm? Will they discover that it was crime and not a natural death? We will wait for the newspapers; but first a look along Fourteenth street."

Jasper got his hat and went down the stairs.

The first half of the night had waned and it was near midnight as the Night-Hawk stepped into the street. The great aisles of the city were now deserted, but now and then was to be heard the footsteps of some solitary pedestrian.

The woman, Zira, who had called on him two years before, was then living in Fourteenth street, or at least she had told him so, and the note-book had furnished him with her address.

If Zira was the same woman who had been Horrox's mad fare he might run across her in the house on Fourteenth street; but if, as the old man had suggested, she feared the hands which had killed Gorell Grimm, she might not be found near that quarter of the city.

The Night-Hawk made his way by the nearest route to the place designated by his note-book. He cared nothing for the shadowy figures that brushed him as he hurried along, and when he reached the spot and looked up at the tall house which might hold the living clue to the new mystery, he wondered if the mad woman had taken refuge in the place.

"It is a good thing that I noted down the address that she gave me at the time," said the detective. "Third floor, second door to right; I ought to find that, even in a house of this sort and without a guide. But this may be a wild-goose chase."

He found the lower door unlocked and in the hall-way into which he stepped a light burning which showed him a staircase.

The night-seeker did not hesitate, but with a glance up the flight began the ascent. As he got away from the light the shadows grew more numerous, but he kept on till he was on the third floor.

He mentally said "second door to the right" as he turned abruptly, and in another moment he was there with his hand on the knob.

Everything was silent in that part of the house, and the searcher turned the knob slowly and looked into a dimly lighted room.

Just across the threshold the detective stopped and looked around him. It had been inhabited, but was not so, now. Some one had been there within the last few hours if not minutes, but he was the only tenant of the place at that time.

Everything betokened that he had entered the late abode of some woman.

He advanced toward the table littered with bits of torn paper and then looked at the tumbled couch in one corner of the apartment, but the bird had flown.

"Just too late to catch her," smiled the Night-Hawk to himself and as he turned toward the door he heard a noise.

In another instant a figure reeled into the room, and standing for half a second in the middle of the floor, it fell forward, with a shriek that might have roused every one in the house.

Jasper Joyce was at the bed in a minute, and striking the match that seemed to find his fingers, he held the flame down till it revealed a face; and he knew it to be the face of the woman who had visited him two years before.

"The bird has come back!" he cried. "This is Jack's passenger."

CHAPTER III.

WILLING, YET AFRAID.

ACCUSTOMED to startling scenes, Jasper Joyce continued to look at the face before him for a minute without betraying that what he saw was above the ordinary.

The occupant of the couch seemed to have fallen in a dead stupor, and as the match burned low in the detective's hand, he turned back and lit the gas.

Then he perceived that the woman had left the door ajar and he closed it before he turned again to her.

There was no doubt that he had come face to face again with the one who had visited him two years before, and whom he had promised to befriend if she should ever need help.

And from Jack Horrox's description of his fare, the Night-Hawk was quite sure that he had found her in the room on Fourteenth street.

It was some time ere the woman opened her eyes, and as they seemed to wander round the room, the detective took the hand and raised it.

He noticed on one of the fingers a ring, the setting of which was a red stone, and this again served to identify the person before him as his old time caller.

For some time the woman looked at Jasper Joyce; then she raised herself on her elbow and smiled.

"Were you waiting for me?" she asked, in half-frightened tones. "Were you crouching here like the terror of the jungle? Where are the rest of the Tigers? Where are Theron and Pasca for you must be Jorrock."

"Jorrock?"

"Yes, the head fiend of them all—the head of the Dastard D's. You are Jorrock, are you not, and—well, you have found me, haven't you?"

Jasper Joyce, still holding the hand which seemed to grow cold while the strange creature talked, said:

"I may not be Jorrock after all. Haven't you thought that I may not be the person you seem to fear?"

She threw up her arms and they encircled the detective's neck, pulling him down, and at the same time transfixing him with the coal-black eyes.

"Heavens! you are not Jorrock," she cried. "I see now that you haven't that demon's eyes, nor his cold, soft skin."

Jasper had some difficulty disengaging himself from the woman's embrace; but when he had done so, he drew back and watched her as she sat on the edge of the bed and looked at him.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"Don't you know? You have seen me before."

"I never saw you."

"You started for my office to-night."

One of the transparent hands was passed over the forehead and the woman seemed to smile.

"Why should I go to you?"

"That is a secret which is in your keeping, but you turned back at the door of my office. The cabman took you back to Union Square."

"Oh, I know now," and she started, as if from the very suddenness of the recollection.

"You must be— You are the man of many clues and trails. You must be the Javert of New York!"

Jasper Joyce nodded.

"I am Jasper Joyce," said he, "and you were the coming to see me when something turned you back; but you left a note in the cab—"

"Did I? You see they were after me—after me with the strange weapons that kill, as none others can kill. That was enough to make me turn back."

"You are Zira."

"It is true," and the speaker was on her feet as she uttered these words. "Would to God I had been nameless, or that the sun had never shone for a moment upon me. You are the detective to whom I was taking the news of the last stroke of the Dastard D's, and for whom I had a story such as has never been told to a man-shadower in this or any other city."

"I am ready to listen to you now."

A most wonderful change came over the face of the woman, now sitting once more on the edge of the low bed. It turned white in a moment and the eyes seemed to sink to immeasurable depths in her head.

"What, tell you the story of a miserable life and a terrible death?" she exclaimed.

"You are a clue-hunter and for me to give you the one you want, is to pass into the shadow, never to come out of it with breath in my body."

"But I promised to help you in the day of trouble and the note, half finished, which you left in the cab, tells me that that day has arrived in your life."

"It is here," she spoke, through clinched teeth as it seemed, for the lips barely moved.

"You know that he is dead?"

"Miles Maccoon?"

"Miles Maccoon! You have not seen him?"

"I have not."

"You know that he has been murdered; but there with all your acumen, you stop."

She laughed.

"If I did not care to open my mouth you would halt there forever. You would stand in a labyrinth from which there would be no emergence. I am the person who can give you the thread that will let you through the dark intricacies of this puzzle, and yet you call yourself a detective—a man-hunter!"

"You are not going to tell me," said the detective. "Then, I shall prove that I do not need the thread you speak of."

"Just as you please. You have called me Zira. Did I sign the note that was found in the cab?"

"You did not, but you forget that when you came to me months ago you left your name and address and—"

"Ah, what a memory you have, or perhaps you made a note of it at the time."

"Never mind which, Zira; I have found you."

"What did the cabman think of me?"

"He did not know what to think. You seem to be in a better state of mind now than when you parted with him."

"Do I? What happened then?"

"You acted like one bewitched. You demanded to be taken back to where you found him, and he drove you back and saw you vanish."

"My God! I must have seen something; I must have heard the tread of the Tigers. I must have heard a whisper at my ear; but never mind. I am back in the old nest!"

The Gotham Javert was becoming provoked at the woman's shilly-shallying, and was eager to come to the main point of the game.

He drew off toward the door and laid his hand on the knob, at the same time saying:

"The clue which you profess to have can be found without your help. You forget, woman, that I may not assist you when you need help with the Tigers, as you call them, around you."

"In the first place, go out and search the landings," she urged. "Go out and see if any of the Dastard D's are in lurking; and look out for yourself! Remember that you are in this game of life and death, and if against them that they are against you!"

Jasper left the room and searched the shady landings of the tall house, but saw nothing, and after an absence of ten minutes he came back to the woman.

She was standing at the table, her figure

drawn up and her black eyes watching the door with the eagerness of a lynx.

"No one?" she asked.

"No one," echoed the detective.

"Shut the door, then."

Joyce did so, and then motioned for the woman to be seated.

She took the chair on the further side of the table and seemed to wait for a command to proceed.

"This is the third floor back," she said with a look toward the one window of the room. "This is a strange place for one to hide from the Destroyers, but where else would I be as safe? By the way, would it not be well for us to make sure that the Dastard D's are not on the trail to-night?"

"I have examined the house as far as I can."

"The inside of it, you mean. Come, we will look at the outside."

"How, Zira?"

She sprung up and rushed toward the window, the curtain of which she caught and lifted suddenly.

In another instant her face was glued against the pane and the detective, watching her closely, could not help smiling at her secret fear of some dread evil.

"I told you so!" she cried, without so much as looking over her shoulder to see if he were watching her.

Jasper jumped up, and in a moment was at her side.

"It is gone now!" she laughed. "Ah, you can't escape the Dastard D's when once they have you on the list."

"But, what did you see?"

"The cord!"

"What cord?"

"The cord they use—not as the thugs use it, for they are no thugs. I saw it a moment, and then it vanished."

"Where was it?"

"Fastened to the window."

Jasper laid his hand on the sash to throw it up, but the hand of Zira held him back.

"They are climbers, for they have performed feats of all sorts, and Jorrock and Pasca—ah, they are the agile fiends of the game!"

"But, what was at the end of the rope—anything when you saw it?"

"No; but, where the cord is, there one of them must be," and the woman smiled in the detective's face. "You will know something of them if you try to find out who killed Miles Maccoon."

"Or Gorell Grimm, as he was generally known to Americans."

"Who told you that?" she demanded.

"You have already discovered something."

"And without your aid, too," was the reply. "Don't you see that you are not the only person who knows something about the past of this man whom you call the victim of the Dastard D's?"

"Then I need not speak."

"You do not understand me. You can speak and tell me much. You can put me on the trail, Zira, and I will ferret out the mystery and make light all the dark places."

"That would be telling too much. I would have to go too deep into the lives of people. I would have to tear off too many masks, and I dare not tell you about myself."

She walked back to the table and, looking up at the detective, suddenly exclaimed:

"If you are determined to find out who killed Miles Maccoon and why, the trail is yonder. You know where Gorell Grimm lived. You know from me and the other one that he is dead, and you have guessed that the Dastard D's have found him. That is all."

"You refuse, then, to give me the clue?"

"Men like you find them."

"You are living in fear of this same dread hand, and yet you will not protect yourself?"

"The Cord was at the window a while ago and at the end of it was—what?"

"One of the band?"

"A hand as deadly as the hand of the thug! Well, perhaps Miles Maccoon deserved what he got, but that makes his death murder none the less. Wait, I will open the door, Jasper Joyce. What did you do with the unfinished note which was found in the cab?"

"It is safe."

"Will you destroy for my sake that bit of mad writing?"

"You fear it will fall into the hands of the master spirits of the band?"

"Won't you destroy it?"

"For the true story—for the clue you were ready to give me at one time to-night."

Zira, the Strange, seemed to cower before the detective, but she suddenly recovered and her hand pointed toward the door.

"Keep it," she cried. "If it gives you a clue well and good, and if it ends forever the career of the cleverest man-hunter in New York let no blame rest upon Zira."

"None shall rest there, woman, whatever comes. The blame shall be mine."

"And the victory yours, too?"

Joyce looked at her a moment without speaking.

"The victory shall be mine, too!" he exclaimed.

A strange, derisive laugh mocked him as he opened the door, and when he turned to bid the woman good-night he saw her laughing yet at the table.

"I'll name them for you again, Detective Joyce. They are Jorroek, Pasca and Theron—three Tigers loose in New York. There were four, but one is dead—dead, ha! ha! And they say that the time has come for them to seek out and kill the woman who has come between them and final vengeance. But that woman will meet her destiny as cool as the coolest of the D's."

Seeing that these words were intended as her last, the Gotham Javert closed the door and went down the stairs.

Not until he had reached the last landing did he note anything suspicious; then he heard the opening of a door somewhere and, instinctively looking around, the Night-Hawk saw standing in the dim light of a lamp half hidden, a man in his shirt-sleeves.

It was but the contour of this man's face, he saw, and a moment later it vanished, but he had it indelibly impressed upon his memory.

In but a few hours he was to recall this seemingly trifling incident with terrible distinctness, and prove that the Dastard D's were all that Zira the Strange had painted them, and that he had tackled a mystery which was to become the most startling adventure of his daring career.

CHAPTER IV.

THE OVERHEARD OATH.

It was true, as Nickum Nox had informed Detective Joyce, that Gorell Grimm was dead.

The house on Eighth avenue, called an odd house by the detective was a structure inside and out decidedly "odd."

It was an old affair and its first owner had long since departed, this life, leaving behind him as his last legacy the old place said to be an abode of mystery.

This Gorell Grimm, a man of five-and-forty, had come to the house some years prior to the date of our romance, and having been struck with its oddity, or something else, had purchased it, paying cash and taking possession at once, as it had not been inhabited since the death of its first tenant.

Grimm's companions were two in number, one a beautiful young girl and the other a man-servant, who would have attracted attention anywhere.

Of Gorell's past no one seemed to know anything and the city cared nothing for it.

He was believed to have money, and though he never banked much, he was regarded as rich. It was understood that he had stored away in the old house plenty of jewels, uncut and never set at all—jewels fine and numerous enough to be a king's ransom.

And this man was dead.

About the hour of the Night-Hawk's visit to the woman called Zira, the Strange, a figure stopped on the broad staircase leading to the second floor of the Grimm house.

It paused in the light of the jet burning in the hall below but it did not seem to like the situation.

It leaned against the wall at the end of the stairs where the only shadow lay and while there it used two very bright and very black eyes to watch the floor beneath.

This person was Gaspard Marks, the old

servant who had inhabited the house along with the dead man and Minon.

His age might have been sixty, but he was nimble and full of action; his arms were exceedingly long like an ape's, and his head was set full upon his shoulders, giving him no neck at all, and causing him to present the appearance of being deformed.

But he was not deformed, only his arms were unusually long, and his limbs rather short for a person of his build.

Down in the library at the right of the hall lay the body of the man who was to give the New York Javert the great puzzle of his life.

Did Gaspard Marks know that this man had had two names? Was he aware that some called him Miles Maccoon, and that a woman not very far off had informed a detective that his master had been murdered?

While the strange being on the stairs waited and watched, a door opened and there came into the hall the figure of a young woman.

"I thought so," laughed the monstrosity under his breath. "I've been waiting for her and she is here!"

He hugged the wall, but did not lose sight of the person beneath him.

"She is going into the library and I will see what takes place. That's what I'm here for."

The fair girl passed over to the door and opened it, then she vanished while the man on the steps with another grin slipped down and craned his neck toward the portal.

Not a sound came from the room. He might imagine what was taking place in the apartment where lay the sheeted figure of Gorell Grimm; but he could see nothing.

Eager to see, as if he were a paid spy, he ventured to try the door, and he found that it yielded to his touch.

He opened it far enough to let him take a survey of the place and he saw a figure at the desk with her back turned toward him.

Of course this was the young girl whom he had seen enter the room.

In front of her burned a light which also showed him something at one side of the room and the human outlines told him what it was.

Presently the girl turned half-way round, but the eyes at the door did not move.

In another moment she held a little packet in the flame of the jet, and Gaspard Marks saw it waste away until every particle of it was consumed.

"He would thank me for this, could he but know," spoke the girl, aloud. "He would smile at what I have done if he were not dead over yonder. I will not let his name become tarnished for the vultures of this city to feast on. I will do my duty."

She rose and crossed to where the silent figure lay.

Gaspard Marks's eyes got a greenish cast while he leaned forward with a demon's eagerness to watch her every movement.

"What is she going to say or do now?" he asked himself. "What will I have to report when next—"

"I trust that I do not accuse any one of the darkest crime in the decalogue," said Minon. "I would not accuse any one of murder, but before God, I cannot keep down the terrible thoughts that rise in my mind. I cannot help recalling what I have seen within the last ten days. What was his fear and why did he burn those papers? Why, too, did he call me into this room and give me the packet which I am not to open for years, or until after he was dead, as he said with white lips."

"If I tell my suspicions the police will come and with them the detectives. Then I shall find myself on the witness stand and surrounded by reporters and plied with a thousand-and-one questions which will tend to render me miserable. No, I will keep my thoughts to myself. I will keep the dread secret, but some day I will avenge him."

"Some day, Gorell Grimm, I will avenge this dastardly crime and when I do, the right hand shall pay for the blow struck in secret and beneath this roof. There have been traitors and spies; there has been a dark conspiracy. He has been surrounded by foes for months—foes whose proximity was known to him and for whom he waited with the coolness of a Stoic. Vengeance may be

the Lord's; but my hand shall hasten it, and my voice some day shall be raised against the demons who have brought about this terrible change from life to death."

Gaspard Marks at the door heard every word of this self-imposed vow.

He could not miss a syllable, for, Minon spoke without knowledge that the spy was near, or that the eyes of the paid watch were regarding her all the time.

The sheet which she had lifted from the face of the dead she let fall and turned away, but not quick enough to see the face of Marks as it was withdrawn.

The spy fell back and fearing that Minon was about to quit the room he glided upstairs and again hugged the shadows on the wall.

Minon came out and passed into a room opposite the library, after which the ape-like creature came down and slipped into the room of the dead.

He crept to the desk and turned on the light. He opened the desk and ran his long fingers through its littered contents, but found nothing worth taking.

The ashes of the papers which Minon had burnt had been taken up by the cautious girl and no traces of them remained.

"She's cute," simpered Gaspard Marks. "She is up to snuff, that girl is, and we will have a time with her. She meant what she said over the body yonder, but wait—just wait till another hand is played. Won't tell the police, eh? That's clever. Doesn't want notoriety. That's clever, too!" and he laughed.

"Seems to me," he continued, "that them other things ought to be about the house somewhere, since she says that he called her into his room and gave them to her some time ago. Wait till she falls asleep. I'll use my eyes then; but first— Yes, I'll see him first."

Ten minutes later a man slipped from the Grimm house and darted round the nearest corner.

The arms of this person did not look very long now, but they belonged to Gaspard all the same, and he had a knack of carrying them so as to hide their ape-like length and shape.

He walked fast, turned half a dozen corners before he stopped, and darting away from the street lamps, he turned up in an alley where he opened a little door with a key which he took from his pocket, and was out of sight.

"Who's there?" said a voice from somewhere, as Gaspard halted in a room nearly dark.

"The Imp of Midnight," was responded. A door opened and the man went forward. As he crossed a step the door closed and he was in a well-lighted room.

"You take an early hour for your call," said a man who sat in an arm-chair with his feet crossed on the edge of a table and wreaths of smoke curling above his head.

The apartment was elegantly furnished; everything to be seen was of the richest description and the man himself was well dressed and handsome.

"You told me to come at all hours if I deemed it essential, didn't you?" asked Gaspard.

"So I did."

"Well, business fetched me hither at this hour. I hope you don't object to that?"

"Of course not."

The handsome man pushed a half-filled box of cigars toward Gaspard, but he waved them aside.

"Don't care about a cigar, eh? All right," said the smoker. "You seem to have some news. Well, you see that I am listening."

Marks did not speak for a moment; then he laid his hat on the table.

"She went in to where he lies," he remarked at length, looking at his companion's face.

"She did, eh?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Not quite an hour ago."

"You saw her, did you?"

"That's my business, you know."

"Of course. Well, having seen her enter the dead room, what else did you see?"

"She went to the desk and found something in it."

"In the desk? I thought—"

"I thought so, too," said Gaspard with a grin. "But what she found there seemed of some importance, for she held it in the flame till there was a heap of ashes at her feet."

"The deuce she did! Destroyed it totally?"

"So well that when I came to find the ashes, they were gone."

The man with the cigar took the weed from between his lips and looked over it at Gaspard Marks.

"Why didn't you prevent her?" he asked.

"I had no such instructions, you know."

"Ah! but you might have taken the bull by the horns—"

"And betrayed us all? No, I didn't think it proper to do that thing."

"You did right. You might have bungled the whole affair; but you showed a level head. Well, what next?"

"She then went across to the body and took an oath."

"Over it?"

"Yes. She swore to keep her peace till the time comes, as she said. She will not tell the police anything; she will hold her peace; but she will avenge him."

"Did you hear her say this?"

"I did. I was at the door all the time and I have ears."

"Go on. Let me have it all."

"After that she went to her room and I— I waited awhile and came here."

For some moments no other words passed between the two men. Gaspard Marks watched the one with his polished boots on the table, and now and then he lost his face in clouds of smoke.

"What am I to do next?" he asked at last.

"You ought to know," was the answer.

"You are to go back to your post. You are to take care of things there. We will manage everything outside."

"What if the detectives should suspect—"

"By Jove! I almost wish they would. That would give us a chance to show them that they are nothing in shrewdness to the Three Brothers of Trinidad."

Both Gaspard Marks and the other laughed together.

CHAPTER V.

THE DETECTIVE'S VISIT.

It was a very quiet funeral by which Gorell Grimm, or Miles Maccoon, was laid away in the city of the dead.

Seated in one of the carriages that followed the remains were Minon and Gaspard Marks.

They did not speak during the whole affair, and what they thought about was their own secrets.

The man with the ape arms watched the fair young girl all the time, but kept his own counsel. He may have recalled the scenes in the room of the dead, the midnight oath and other events, and Minon may have thought of the same things; but they rode on and saw all that was mortal of the man whom they followed so solemnly laid to rest.

And yet no one knew that a crime had been committed; no one had come to the house to say that murder had been done, and Zira and Minon, who perhaps never saw one another, did not unseal their lips openly to the authorities.

When the young girl came back to the house she found that some one had called.

Those who had been left in charge of the place told her that a man had asked for her, but had gone off again without leaving his name or saying when he would come again.

Minon went to her room and shut the door.

"They are here yet," she said, going to the wall and touching a button there, thus opening a little door into which she thrust her small hand. "I will keep them till the right time, and the world will not know that they are here. And until that same time will I keep my secret and then—then, vengeance!"

She closed the niche and turned away, but did not quit the apartment.

One hour later a maid whom Minon had engaged some time previous came up and knocked lightly on the door.

"The gentleman has come back," announced the girl when Minon opened the door.

"The one who was here when we were gone away?"

"Yes."

Minon went below and entered the library. She saw at once that she had a visitor of some importance, for the moment she set eyes on him even in the uncertain light that prevailed, a strange feeling took possession of her and she trembled.

She found herself face to face with a man whom she had never met before.

He was passably good-looking, and wore plain clothes; his figure was good and his darkish face smooth and expressive. But it was the eyes that struck Minon. They were sharp and piercing as a hawk's, and seemed to look her through even while their possessor seemed to take but little note of her.

When the young woman had thrown back the curtain to let a flood of light into the room, her caller took from his pocket a card which he extended with a bow.

Minon looked and saw upon the white surface a name with which she was totally unfamiliar:

"JASPER JOYCE."

The name so well known throughout the length and breadth of the city had no significance to her. She had never heard of the famous Night-Hawk Detective, and his victories were totally unknown to her. Therefore, when she had noticed the name on the card, she looked up and smiled:

"So you are Mr. Joyce? Of course I am not aware of the purport of your visit at this time. You have heard of the death of Gorell Grimm, who was laid to rest to-day?"

"I have heard," was the reply. "You are Miss Minon Grimm?"

"I am Miss Minon."

"The child of the deceased."

The girl started. The detective's words seemed to have a sound that sent a nameless thrill through her; and for half a minute her lips did not part.

Why should she hesitate to say that she was Miss Minon Grimm? Why, if the dead man had been her father, should she look at the questioner and remain silent?

Suddenly she came over to where the detective was seated and standing near him looked down into his face and said:

"I am not Minon Grimm."

"But—"

"Hear me through. I am an adopted daughter. Gorell Grimm never had any children."

"Was he never married?"

Minon stopped again. There were words on the end of her tongue; but she did not speak them.

"If you are not Minon Grimm, the world has been deceived."

"Oh," she smiled, "the world has often been deceived. But you have not stated the purport of your call."

The Gotham Javert seemed to be studying the face above him and for a moment longer he kept up the study.

"You never told any person about his death," he said at last. "You have kept the secret very well, for you must know, girls that Gorell Grimm was murdered?"

The effect of these words upon the girl who heard all with a blanched face was startling. She fell back with clinched hands and her eyes seemed ready to start from her head.

"Who told you this?" she demanded. Who makes such a terrible accusation? *Murdered?* Gorell Grimm? Why, do you suppose we could keep from the police a crime of this nature?"

"The secret has not been very well kept," was the reply. "You see that we know of it."

"You know of it? Then you—"

She did not finish but retreated from him and dropped into a chair near by. There she folded her hands and remained silent for some time.

Jasper Joyce waited for her to speak, all the time pretending to take but little notice of her, as if he was looking round the room at the rich appointments.

"I know," suddenly cried Minon. "You are one of these men who hunt men down. You are a detective. Who told you to come here?"

"No one."

"Where did you hear anything that would lead you to believe that some one helped Gorell Grimm out of the world?"

"We find out such things. That is our business, miss."

"Yes, yes. I hope I have no secret enemy who would send you hither professionally," then she stopped a moment. "We have enemies, all of us. We have secret enemies and of course, if he was killed, as you think, we must have had foes as implacable as the tiger."

Minon hardly knew what she was saying, for her face was flushed and she was talking fast.

Jasper Joyce said nothing, but let her go on as if he thought she would entrap herself.

"You did not intend to tell us," he said at last.

"I did not—not for the present at least," was the answer.

"Yet you admit that there was foul play."

Minon got up and crossed the room to the door. She opened it and for half a minute looked into the hall, then came back and resumed her seat.

A change had come over her face. She seemed to regard the man in her presence in the light of a friend and helper, and perhaps she felt how futile would be her attempt to carry out her oath without the help of a strong arm and an active brain. What if this man had been sent to assist her? What if he had come to be her friend and to work with her against Gorell Grimm's enemies, and to help her on to that revenge which she had sworn over the corpse of the man she had seen that day laid under ground?

These thoughts may have chased one another through Minon's mind in the space of a minute while she sat before the man-hunter of Gotham. At any rate, the silent ferret saw that she was thinking deeply and he did not disturb her.

"It was murder," suddenly said Minon. "It was murder, secret and dark, the result of a conspiracy, and by the hand of the coolest fiend under the sun. I saw him come and go. I stood in the shadows of the stair-case and saw him quit this house with the result of his diabolical visit behind."

"What was he like?"

"Ah, that is what I cannot tell you."

"But you saw him?"

"I saw him. There are times when you see, yet you appear to note nothing," was the reply. "You may stand in the dark and see figures plainly, but for the life of you you cannot tell what they are like. That demon stopped in the hall and looked up at me. I shrunk against the wall and a hand seemed to reach up from the floor below and hold me there. I felt at my throat a hand as plainly as if it were my own. I saw a pair of eyes that seemed to burn against my cheek and while I saw the man who did the deed, I cannot tell you what he was like."

"Call it what you will, mesmeric power or demonism," continued Minon with a slight smile, "I know not what to call it—that man did the deed."

"You say you saw him come as well as go?"

"I did. In fact I opened the door to him."

"Then you saw his face."

"Yes, but those eyes held me in the same spell and he passed to the library and I went back to my room."

"After his departure what?"

"Gaspard came down stairs—he has a room on the third floor and he locked the library door for the night."

"Locked Gorell Grimm in the library?"

"Come with me. I will show you the situation," and Minon rose. "I will show you that Gaspard locked the door believing that his master had retired to his room beyond the library, and Gaspard has been locking the library at a certain hour for more than a year."

The girl led the detective into the darkened room which she relieved with some light, and then she pointed to a certain door.

"That door leads to another room in which there is a staircase leading to his private apartments up-stairs," she said. "Of course Gaspard thought that he had retired and down he came and locked the outer door."

"Where was he found dead?"

"In his chair up-stairs?"

"Not in the library, girl?"

"Not here. You shall see all, sir."

Again the detective followed the dead man's adopted and in a short time he stood in a small apartment on the second floor.

Minon showed him where the corpse of Gorell Grimm was discovered by Gaspard, and how the articles in the room were arranged at the time.

"Have you tried to recall the face of the man who called that night?" asked Joyce.

"A hundred times," was the quick answer, "but as well might I try to think of the first acts of my life. I know that the eyes seemed to burn my flesh, that the face, at first dark, grew light, as if surrounded by a halo, and when it had vanished, I stood on the steps in a sweat and all atremble. What was it?"

Jasper Joyce shook his head and said:

"It must have been the exercise of some spell known to the man who came and went. Now, miss, what about your tenants here?"

"We are alone now—Gaspard and I."

"Who is Gaspard?"

"Gorell Grimm picked him up somewhere in the city a year ago and brought him home. He is a strange man with long arms and, at times, a surly disposition rules him; but he is faithful, and I trust him."

"Entirely?"

"Yes," Minon spoke unreservedly. "I don't see why I should not trust Gaspard."

"You have no secrets from him, then?"

Minon hesitated a moment.

"Not many," she said, smiling. "Of course we all have secrets for which we have no confidants."

Perhaps she thought of the oath beside the dead; for at that moment she turned her face and looked toward the window, leaving the ferret to draw his own conclusions from her manner.

"You have a secret which you have not told this Gaspard," said Jasper Joyce, under his breath.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DASTARD D.

BEFORE the detective left the house on Eighth avenue he hardly knew what to think.

He had encountered a singular person in Minon Grimm, as she called herself; and he had to smile to himself as he turned back to his little den to think that he had formed a partnership with her.

It was to be a secret trail, a trail of which the police of New York should know nothing.

It was to be a hunt for the hand which had taken the life of Gorell Grimm, known to others as Miles Maccoon; and when the detective had shut the door of his place and locked it, something he rarely did, he went to the table and took something from his pocket.

This was a small packet which Minon had placed in his hands and he was eager to see what it contained.

Alone in the den Jasper Joyce felt that he would not be disturbed for some time, for Nickum Nox was probably engaged in his strange calling of which the reader shall know something ere long, and Chatters, his boy friend, had not turned up for awhile.

The packet was wrapped in oiled silk, as if to protect it from the weather, and Jasper opened it with care.

When it had been opened some papers tied with a crimson string fell out upon the table, and the detective picked them up with professional curiosity.

The night had come again.

Down on the street the early strollers were seeking the Park, for the air had not cooled off since sundown, and the rattle of the cabs came up now and then to Jasper's ears.

The contents of the tied packet consisted of three papers and the detective took them serially.

The first was somewhat lengthy, but it was rather closely written in black ink.

It was dated at a time twelve years previous to the present inspection and from what the detective could see by a casual glance ere he laid it aside to peep at the others, it had been written in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad.

The second paper consisted of but one sheet, and on one side was a lot of writing exactly like that in which the first paper was

written, while the back of the sheet was covered with some strange drawings that puzzled the ferret.

"I'll come back to these in a few moments," said he, as he opened the third and last paper; "I will see what is in this document, and then I will take them up carefully and see what Minon has intrusted to my care."

An expression of disgust parted the detective's lips as the last document was opened.

It seemed to contain nothing at all. The paper was as white as if it had never been touched by a pen, and as the detective gazed at it he could not repress a smile.

"There is a good deal of fraud in the world," said Jasper Joyce, about to drop the white sheet and turn back to the others which promised to reward him. "Minon evidently never looked into these papers, else she would have told me of the blank sheet. This is one of the secrets she has kept from Gaspard Marks, the man whom she says she could trust with her life. Well, we will see if her confidence has been well placed."

The paper which fell first into the detective's hands after dropping the white sheet was the second one.

As he turned it over so as to look at the strange drawing on one of the pages, he started.

That side of the sheet was white.

"What black art is this?" he exclaimed.

"A moment ago this page was covered with odd-looking pictures; but now they have vanished like a conjurer's eggs. This is mystery, indeed."

He leaned toward the light and then held the paper between him and it.

The writing, too, had vanished.

"More and more," cried the mystified ferret with a laugh. "Here is something for Nickum. The old man knows everything about sympathetic inks and the like, and I seem to have run across one who has been dealing in them."

He caught up the three documents and lowered the gas as he hid the papers from the light.

"It's no use. I have ruined my chances of getting anything out of these papers," he said. "I will have to resort to something in chemistry, and if Nickum can't help me out, why, I will have to give up in disgust."

Jasper Joyce thrust the three documents into the little envelope from which he had taken them and got up.

"It's early and I can wait for Nickum if I don't find him in," he went on. "This is a case of deep mystery, and the trail to the murderer of Miles Maccoon may not be found without these papers."

He went down upon the street and mingled with the crowd.

As he emerged from his doorway he was seen by a man who appeared to be lounging in the vicinity, for when the detective moved off this person who had a tread like a cat followed him to the door of a house a number of squares distant.

Jasper Joyce ran up three flights of steps and knocked at a door.

In a moment a key on the inside turned in the lock and the face of a boy with unusually large ears looked out.

"Where's Professor Nox?" asked the caller.

"Gone out, sir, and I was told to let no one in till he came back."

"Oh, you were, eh? Well, you will have to make an exception in my case, for I will keep house till Nickum comes and will stand between you and disobedience of orders."

"You're a cool one," said the boy, drawing back as the detective pushed into the room.

"Go out and do what you please. I'll wait for Nickum."

"You know him, eh?"

"Yes."

The Gotham Javert was thus left alone in the room. It was not large, but on one side was a cupboard which was filled with chemical apparatus and a number of vials. The walls were adorned with printed designs and advertisements of chemical goods, and everything betokened the abode of some one who knew something about chemistry.

Jasper Joyce crossed his legs and waited

for Nickum Nox. He had come to the home of one of the strangest characters in New York, and a man whose learning was so profound that at times he was sought out by those supposed to know everything in certain branches; and he never failed to enlighten them.

An hour passed. Few sounds came up to the room on the third floor of the tall brick building in which Nickum Nox worked and lived.

Once or twice footsteps came to the door and vanished, as if the boy had slipped back to see the man he had admitted was in the laboratory.

With nothing else to do, Jasper took the packet from his pocket and removed the three papers again. His curiosity was still unabated, and he wondered what secret they held and whether Nickum Nox would be equal to the emergency.

As he laid them on the little table near which he sat a key growled in the door and a man entered.

"Ho! in the nest, eh?" cried the newcomer as he espied the detective.

"I've been here an hour or more," was the reply. "I thought you would drop in."

"Where's the boy?"

"I coaxed him out to get a breath of air on the street."

Nickum Nox removed his hat, revealing a bald head and a high forehead as well as a pair of keen little eyes which the brim shaded.

"What have you there, Jasper?"

Nickum had seen the document on the table.

"This seems to be a sheet of blank paper," was the answer as Jasper extended one of the documents.

"That implies that you have a mystery in your hands. Seems to be, eh?"

The old man took the paper and looked at it a moment in the light of his lamp. He smiled at first, then frowned a little and walked over to the cupboard.

"We'll see," he said, taking a vial from one of the shelves. "We'll try an experiment."

When he came back to the table he carried, besides the vial, a porcelain tray, into which he poured a few drops of the greenish fluid from the bottle, adding to them some water. Then he carefully placed the white sheet into the mixture and leaned over it with manifest eagerness.

"Come over here, Jasper," he said, without looking up.

In an instant the detective was at his side and he was looking at the very black writing that stood out on the sheet, from top to bottom.

"I thought I could hit it," smiled Nickum. "You see they don't often fool the old man very long. Now read what you see, Jasper."

Already the man-hunter was doing this.

"It is no secret of mine. It is for you as well, Nickum," he said.

"All right."

They read together. For some time they kept silence, and then the hand of the old man fell lightly upon the detective's shoulder.

"It's a voice from Trinidad," said he. "It's a cry from the islands of the far-away seas. Are the other sheets blank like this one?"

"They were all right, covered with writing, till I exposed them to the light, when presto! the writing vanished."

"Aha! then, we will see what they tell us."

The immersed sheet was taken from the bath and one of the others thrown into it.

The result was the same, but the moment Nickum Nox saw the marks on the upturned page he uttered a sharp cry.

Both men were looking at the half-nude figure of a man—a man stripped to the waist and with his back turned toward them.

The drawing was perfect, as if it had been made by a real artist, the lines were true, and the figure was that of an athlete with broad shoulders and well-poised head.

"It is wonderful!" cried the detective, looking for a moment at the man at his side. "Who would have thought that this fellow was hidden in the sheet in this manner?"

"Look at the inscription beneath the figure," said the old chemist. "There is a date there and other words."

The detective bent nearer the picture and read:

"New York, Jan. 1st, 187—."

"You see," said Nickum, "that the date on the other sheet is a year sooner than this, and that it shows that that page was written in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. The hand-writing is the same on both sheets; but here we have 'New York, Jan. 1st, 187—.' Wait a minute. I think I see something else."

The old man ran to the cupboard and came back with another vial which he held over the tray.

"That man may tell us something," said he with one of his peculiar grins as he poured a few drops of the contents of the second vial into the mixture.

Jasper Joyce watched the result with breathless eagerness.

The color of the mixture changed, but the man on the sheet stood out clearer than ever.

"See! He is branded!" cried Nickum Nox, pointing at the figure. "What is that on his back?"

"It is the letter 'D.'"

"So it is. Branded for life with a letter of which we know nothing when we look at it on the unknown man's skin."

As for Jasper Joyce, he was thinking as he had not thought before. His mind was a storehouse for the startling, but out of it all came the figure of Zira, the Strange, and she seemed to be telling him again about the Dastard D's whom she had called Jorrock, Pasca and Theron.

Was he now looking at the "D" brand on the back of one of them?

Had old Nickum's chemicals revealed the mark in all its strangeness, to bring back to him his adventure in Zira's room and to afford him, in this startling manner, a clue to the murder of Miles Maccoon?

It was a voice from the far-off seas, sure enough; it was a clue from the tropics, and Jasper Joyce believed while he looked at what lay before him, that he had to hunt down this man to end the mystery of the Eighth avenue crime.

"You know what you have to do now," said the voice of Nox, recalling him back to life as it were. "You want that man; and he may want you as well before the game is done."

CHAPTER VII.

STARTLING REVELATIONS.

JASPER JOYCE seemed to have had a new world open to him when he retraced his steps from the den of the old man known to many as the Chemist King.

Indeed Nickum Nox took pride in the title and sometimes playfully alluded to himself as such. Of his past few knew anything, and to the detective who had known him for years, that past was a blank.

It was known that the old man had seen much of the world, and some of the tricks in science which he now and then performed for the ferret when there was no trail to be followed, were done with the allusion that this one had been learned in Paris, and this in India.

These little breaks in the life of the man gave the detective a slight insight into the past which the old man kept dark; and Jasper was too shrewd to inquire further, not that he might receive a back-set; but because he respected the secrecy which Nox seemed anxious to maintain concerning himself.

With the papers dried and apparently white sheets as before, the ferret of Gotham went back to the den on Grand.

He thought of all that had occurred in the old chemist's place; and saw again the figure on the sheet and the strange brand which the chemicals had brought out.

It occurred to him to sound Minon concerning Gorell Grimm's past, for the documents went to show that at one time he had been abroad.

Had he written the papers found in the house after the crime?

Had he drawn the man with the mark in sympathetic ink, and why had he not left directions for bringing it out after his death?

Jasper Joyce reached his little place with thoughts like the foregoing.

The night was still in its first half, and he had decided to go back to where he had left

Zira the Strange. Perhaps she could be induced to tell him more now that he knew something and had the documents to prove it.

What he might have done if he had not found a figure at his door, will never be known, but the moment he gained the landing near his room that figure rose and stood waiting for him.

It was the figure of a boy, not very well dressed; and the detective knew him at once.

"Been here long, Chatters?" asked Jasper.

"'Bout ten minutes. Came in time to get the card she left."

"The card she left? Where is it?"

Chatters, street Arab and the detective's little friend, pulled by the Joyce arm from beneath the wheels of a butcher's cart, dived into the depths of his pockets and fished up a card.

It was crumpled now, and showed the marks of Chatters's fingers.

The detective took it and leaned toward the light.

"When did it come?"

"While I was at the door waiting for you."

"And she said—"

"That she would like to see you."

"When?"

"When you came home."

Jasper Joyce had read the name on the card at a glance, and he looked at the boy with a smile.

"Was she alone, Chatters?"

"She came up here alone, but some one waited for her on the street."

"You know this?"

"I saw her."

"Another woman?"

"A mere girl."

The detective unlocked his door and Chatters slipped in after him.

"Got a clue yet?" asked the boy.

The Javert seemed in no hurry to obey the summons left by the woman who had left the card, for he crossed his legs on the table and lit a cigar.

Chatters leaned against the table and dived his hands into his pockets.

"You know the woman Horrox brought to your house?" said he.

"Yes."

"I've seen her. Queer creature, that. Got wheels here," and Chatters touched his forehead.

"When did you see her, boy?"

"To-night."

"Down on Fourteenth?"

"No; hovering in quite another place."

"Did she see you?"

"Not much! You see, Night-Hawk, I don't let people see me when I am on duty. This woman is an avenger."

"Tell me. What have you seen to-night?"

"In the first place she leads a double life. You've heard of Countess Violet?"

The Javert shook his head.

"Well, that's one of the few things that have escaped you, then. The Countess Violet is a character and is well known in a certain quarter. The countess is a woman of strange actions. She has all the money she wants, lives like a real countess and so on. Has all the pets she wants; says she is the divorced wife of a Russian count whom she married somewhere in Europe; and, well, she is worth seeing, as the countess, as well as the woman who played mad when she rode with Jack."

"Was she the woman who gave you the card you handed me awhile ago?"

"No. But, as the countess, she creates some excitement where she lives. You'll find her in a nice part of town, though the people there believe that she's a good deal away from home, and I guess that's when she's leading the other life."

The detective was interested. He listened to every word as it fell from the boy's tongue and when he had finished he said:

"As the countess you have never met her, of course?"

Chatters gave a prolonged whistle and elevated his eyebrows.

"I'm her page," said he, with a ludicrous grin.

"You? Come, Chatters, where have you been to-night?"

"Out," rejoined the boy, sententiously.

"I haven't been very long from the Countess Violet's establishment. It's a palace, something like those they have in Russia, I suppose; but where she lives on Fourteenth, as Zira, she's quite another person."

"But what means this double life?"

"Secrecy and vengeance; there you have it in a nutshell. She is the Countess Violet to-day, Zira to-morrow. She is a living enigma and a human puzzle. There, I've said it in few words. You ought to see her palace, Night-Hawk!"

"Where is she now?"

"At this hour she is Zira, and not the Countess Violet."

"Come, then," cried the Night-Hawk.

"I will trust you to prove this, Chatters."

The boy drew back.

"You must prove it if you can," continued the detective. "You say that she leads a double life and lives for vengeance. Show me where the Countess lives."

"To-morrow."

"No; to-night!" cried Jasper in strange earnest.

"You've got your hands full now," said the boy. "Besides, I don't care about getting into trouble to-night."

"You can't if you play fair with me. Remember, Chatters—"

"The cart and the big driver? I never forget," and Chatters came round the table and placed his hand upon the Javert's shoulder. "You don't have to refer to that brave act to remind me of what I owe you. I never forget, I say. To-night it is, if you say so. But leave at home whatever you have on your person that is valuable."

"I thought the Countess lived in a respectable quarter?"

"She does," and Chatters smiled.

"But I must leave all valuables at home, eh? My watch, too?"

"No. Leave behind you anything that pertains to the case in hand now."

Jasper Joyce rose and went behind a curtain. There he placed in a secret compartment in the wall the documents which he had taken to Nickum's, after which he again presented himself to the boy.

"We'll go now," said Chatters.

Jasper locked the door after them and they went to the street below.

"It's across the city," remarked the boy guide. "I am betraying the Countess, but it is for you. Night-Hawk—only for you!"

Half an hour later, with the light of a lamp falling upon their faces, Jasper and the boy stood within a stone's throw of the river and on the face of the latter was a painful expression.

"That's the house," he said, pointing toward a structure shaded even then from the rays of the street lamp by some trees. "It's not very fine outside, but inside it's a palace."

"And you say that Zira spends part of the time there?"

"In that house she is the Countess Violet; she is the tigress whose claws are sharpened for vengeance. Gods! you should see her in that home."

"Why, Chatters?"

"The floors are covered with tiger skins and the walls hung with trophies of her late husband's hunts."

The Night-Hawk drew near and took a better survey of the house. He saw that the shutters were closed and that not a ray of light came from the place.

"When did you become this woman's page or servant?"

"Three weeks ago."

"You never told me, Chatters?"

"One of my secrets, Jasper. We all have them," was the reply. "Come, we'll go back. She isn't at home to-night."

"But the interior of the place. I want to see that."

"No."

"You mean that you won't be a party to my entering?"

"I won't be."

The gaze of the Night-Hawk wandered back to the house and then returned to the boy spy.

"You have the key, Chatters?"

"But not for you to-night, Jasper. Don't make a traitor out of me. Don't ask too much."

"Then, go back and guard my door," ordered the detective.

"What are you going to do?"

"I intend to look at the tiger-skins."

"When she is not at home?"

"Yes."

Chatters fell back, his cheeks blanched.

"I dare not question anything you do. I owe my life to you. I would sacrifice it in a moment for the man who pulled me out from beneath the butcher's cart. You are going into that house? There are places in it to which I have never been admitted, and that while she pretends to take a great fancy to me. Don't go too far if you enter, Night-Hawk!"

Chatters's hand fell from the detective's arm, and with another look he turned away.

Jasper, filled with the desire to enter the strange house, watched the slight figure till it vanished; then he turned toward the closed door.

"Mystery jostles mystery on this trail," said he. "I am suddenly confronted with the story that Zira lives two lives and that she is at times the Countess Violet, the impersonation of vengeance. Do Jorroch, Pasca and Theron know this? Do the Dastard D's know that she is Violet as well as Zira?"

He moved toward the house. He walked to the little dark alley where it ended and slipped into its shadows.

Five minutes afterward there was a dark figure in the cramped yard back of the old dwelling. It crept from shadow to shadow, from fence to door, and let itself into the house itself.

It was the first time the cool-headed detective had entered the Countess Violet's house; he was unfamiliar with its interior, and when he found a door he opened it and stopped.

Darkness and silence surrounded him; the air was close and had a peculiar odor.

As he was about to advance again a door swung open with a slight click, and there appeared in the light of the room beyond, a man—the counterpart of the one seen in the house occupied by Zira the Strange.

CHAPTER VIII.

JORROCK, PASCA OR THERON?

INTO the life of a man, no matter how cool he may be, comes at some time moments when he fears.

That moment had come to Jasper Joyce the detective.

Standing as he thought in the line of vision of the man seen in the doorway, he did not know what to do. To move would be to invite discovery while, if he remained like a statue against the wall, there was the remote possibility that he might not be seen.

Already he was calculating the distance between them; already he was wondering what the unknown would say when he saw him and how long the struggle would last.

Half seconds seem minutes and minutes hours under some circumstances; and as the Night-Hawk watched the tall, well-built man in the dim light that reigned in the other room, he made sure that he had seen him before and he knew where.

Who was this man?—Jorroch, Pasca or Theron?

As suddenly as the door had opened it shut again and the man was gone.

Jasper Joyce could hardly believe that the man was not before him, and for a moment he thought that they were in the dark together in the room.

But they were not; the man had gone back into the other apartment.

Chatters had said nothing about a man in the house. The boy-spy certainly knew nothing of this man's existence as a caller at the Countess Violet's; and this only deepened the mystery already deep enough.

Jasper slipped across the room to the door. Danger, when looked at calmly, only rendered him the cooler, and to retreat now might be to lose some secret on which might hinge the game he was at.

When in the darkness his feet struck a chair he stopped as if a torpedo had gone off underneath his feet.

The detective laid his hand on his revolver, but the silence that followed the collision was not broken, and he advanced again, but this time with the chair in hands.

He found the door and placed the chair alongside, then coolly mounting it, he tried

to look down into the room beyond, by aid of the transom; but the Countess or some one else had balked him.

Still he discovered that the dark cloth that covered the transom was on his side and this was something.

It does not take long to rip a transom's cloth with a keen knife, and the detective was soon looking down into the hidden room.

In an instant Chatters's story about the tiger-skins came back with redoubled force. He was looking at them—on the floor in profusion, and on the walls artistically arranged. It was a scene of regal magnificence; it was a sight which for a moment distended the detective's eyes.

But he did not look so long at the appointments of the room as at its occupant.

He stood at the table as if he had halted there after re-entering the place.

Dark of skin, as if the tropics had browned him; a sharp face covered with a black beard, an aquiline nose, broad shoulders and long arms, at the ends of which were soft hands, small for the man's frame and cruel because of their very femininity.

The man was not an American, as Jasper Joyce could see. Neither was he Spanish, though his face was dark; but there was something about him which recalled a man said to come from the West Indies, with whom the detective had had dealings in a murder case some years before.

Instinctively there came to Jasper's mind the question he had asked himself before.

Jorroch, Pasca or Theron? Which?

He had never seen one of these men. All he knew of them was what Zira had told him, and even then they sometimes seemed myths—men of a mad woman's imagination.

But this man before him was flesh and blood. And while the detective looked down upon him, he could not but admire the graceful pose of figure and the athlete's symmetry.

While he looked the man moved toward the table and sat down.

His movements were cat-like and noiseless. There was in them something of the tropic's springiness, something suggestive of the tiger-cats of the islands of the seas.

He saw the man look round upon the luxuriousness of the chamber; his eyes seemed to get a new light as he did so; and when he drew toward him a dainty bottle of perfume which perhaps the Countess Violet had left there, a smile wreathed his lips.

As he replaced the vial a door opposite him opened and another man entered.

They were strangely alike, and had the same warm blood in their veins.

If the man at the table was Jorroch, was this one Pasca?

The second one was robust, he had a black beard, too; but he was not so stout.

There was more of the runner, and not so much of the athlete in him.

"We have the house to ourselves to-night," said the first man. "We don't happen to find her at home."

The other looked around upon the furnishings and touched one of the tiger-skins.

"Not from Trinidad?" said he with a malicious grin.

"Nor from Russia, either," was the reply, at which both of them laughed.

Jasper Joyce saw the second man take a seat opposite the first, then one took from his bosom a flat bottle which he placed on the table.

A pen was dipped into this bottle and the man seen first by the ferret began to write on a sheet which he had drawn to him from a pile of note-paper.

"Make it strong," said the one who looked on.

"She won't misunderstand," was the reply, and the pen crossed and recrossed the sheet for the following five minutes.

"That will do," was the comment of the one to whom the paper was pushed. "She will understand. You forgot the mark."

"No, not forgot it—only withheld it a moment. Ah! there it is, you see, brother."

The pen made a letter on the sheet, and it was placed underneath a silver paper-weight which was surmounted by a bear.

"Let's go now. We have done enough for to-night."

They pushed back their chairs and stood together as if to show off their figures to the man at the transom, but on the safe side.

"She owns this now. We will demolish

it in a short time," said one, describing the room and its rich belongings with a sweep of the hand. "She thought she could escape us. None escape, brother. The man who rode out a few hours ago lived as long as he did only by our sufferance."

"By nothing else, and this woman is in the same catalogue."

The detective saw them quit the room after turning the light low, probably as they had found it, and for some time he waited on his chair.

Somewhere he heard the opening and closing of a door, and then he left his perch.

The door yielded to his hand, and he stood in the room lately vacated by the unknown.

A stride carried him to the table; his hands fell upon the paper left behind by the men, and his eager eyes read what was thereon.

It was this:

"You can't hide from the Brotherhood. You cannot merge your life into any other than the one you have lived in our sight. We are as merciless as eagles, and you are to feel the bite of the League. You may be the Countess Violet; you may surround yourself with the luxuries of life, or you may play the poor woman of the street. It is all the same with us. You can't escape Jorroch, Pasca and Theron. We have contracted the circle. In a few hours you will follow the other one. And yet you have talked of vengeance! Remember! You are the moth in the flame. Remember the shades of Trinidad!"

These words, though not intended for him, thrilled the detective as he read.

He looked at the large, well-formed "D" at the bottom of the sheet. It told him much; it confirmed a great deal.

He had seen two of the Dastard D's—he had looked down upon a part of the mysterious Brotherhood. He did not know which one was missing.

Jasper laid the paper down and looked around the room.

He would not have been surprised if the door had opened and the men had come back.

Zira was right.

She was in the shadow of death; she stood in the presence of the avenger and she knew that Jorroch, Pasca and Theron were merciless.

The detective moved straight toward the door and opened it.

He passed across it as the two men had done and found himself in another room.

To escape the hand of the Brotherhood, as well as to plan her vengeance, she had installed herself in this house.

But they had found her. They had discovered that she was the so-called Countess Violet, and the detective could imagine with what glee they had unmasked her.

He left the house and went back to his own den.

A figure darted from among the shadows of the hallway as he tried his key and his arm was seized.

He looked down into the face of Chatters.

"You have seen?" cried the boy as the detective dragged him into the room.

"Thank Heaven, you are back alive."

"I am back, Chatters. No more messages for me?"

"None."

"Your Countess lives in style. She has everything to her liking."

"Money will buy anything."

"She likes tiger-skins, I see."

"She is a tigress herself."

"But as Zira, she shows no rage."

"No. I know her as the Countess. You should see her at times when she stands the manikin against the wall and throws at it."

"How's that? Stands a manikin against the wall?"

"Yes, sir. In the room where the tiger-skins are. She stands it there and steps back with a dagger in her hands. She always wears gloves on such occasions, for the knife is sharp and as pointed as a needle. And she can throw! She puts masks on the manikin; she makes it look like a man. Now a man with a black beard and now like one with a mustache alone. It made me shake the first time I caught her at it. You should see her, Jasper."

"But, Chatters, you don't mean to tell me that Zira can throw a knife like that?"

"Zira don't throw knives; it is the Countess Violet, sir," was the quick answer. "It is marvelous. When she stands the manikin against the wall she says, 'Now, Jorrock!' and whiz! goes the dagger. After awhile she gives it another mask and it is 'Now, Pasca,' and then, 'Now, Theron,' until she is tired."

"I would like to see her," said the detective.

"I don't suppose she would practice for you. Such is my mistress, but you can't believe that she is Zira who rode with Jack Horrox and who seemed to lose her head in the cab."

Jasper Joyce made no reply; but his mind was at work.

"Let me show you something, Chatters," he said, taking from the concealed niche in the wall the documents he had received from Minon.

The detective got a basin and some water and into this he dropped a few drops of a greenish fluid from a vial.

The boy looked on with wonderment in his eyes.

Jasper immersed one of the sheets in the mixture and after a while bade Chatters look at it.

"That's it! that's it!" cried the boy, looking up at the ferret.

He had just looked at the human figure on the sheet which the chemicals had brought out just as they had done in Nickum Nox's laboratory.

"Where did you ever see anything like that?" asked Jasper.

"On the back of the manikin which my mistress stands against the wall. There is a big 'D' branded on its back, just as you see in that picture!"

"I see," said Jasper Joyce. "It is a war to the knife."

"And, from the way she throws, the knife's to the hilt!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE BRANDED BACK.

THE most startling discovery of the last few hours was that Zira the Strange should be the Countess Violet, and the Night-Hawk Detective, while he listened to Chatters's story, with what he had seen in the old house, set himself to thinking.

He recalled his interview with Zira in which she had named the three men in the dark game, and their names, Jorrock, Pasca and Theron, were striking enough to be remembered.

It was after the talk with Chatters in the office—the talk in which the boy had said that the mark in the drawing was the same as Violet had on the back of her manikin—that the detective went to another part of the city and stopped at a door the bell of which he pulled with some eagerness.

It was an unseemly hour for a call, but the ferret evidently knew what he was doing, and when the door was opened he slipped into the hall without bestowing more than a passing glance on the person who had admitted him.

Jasper Joyce walked into a room at the side of the hall and sat down.

He was in a small, well-furnished parlor, and a light on the table showed him the furnishings of the place, with the cheap pictures on the walls.

He did not have to wait long, for the door opening near him, let him have a look at the woman who came in.

The detective rose as she entered.

"You were to see me?" he said. "You left your card with the boy at the door."

"That is true. I hoped to find you at home, and then, as I did not, I left the card, as you say. But I fear it is too late now."

"Too late. The night is not far spent and I have plenty of time on my hands."

The woman, who was about forty, rather good-looking, but dark of skin and somewhat haughty, smiled.

"You don't seem to understand me," she said. "I said I feared it is too late and I will explain. You are again on the trail. You have a real mystery this time—a mystery and a fight."

"You seem to know, madam."

"There are some things I cannot help knowing," was the reply. "I must know something to be able to tell you what you should hear."

She had taken a seat and spread the folds of her dark dress about her feet.

"You have found out nothing, as yet. You have been after the clue which seems to elude your grasp. Phera?"

She touched a bell on the table and the door opened.

"Come in, girl," said the woman.

A tall, handsome girl with very black expressive eyes that dropped the moment they encountered the ferret's gaze entered and stood in the center of the room.

"This is the gentleman, Phera."

There was a slight bow and the girl looked away.

"This is Phera," continued the woman turning to Jasper Joyce. "You don't know her? Of course not."

"I have never seen her before."

"Phera is a remarkable creature, and has gifts which no other woman in this great city possesses."

A blush stole over the girl's face and her eyes seemed to get new luster.

"She is a phenomenon. Phera is no seventh daughter of a seeress. She is not a second-sight creature, like those who ply their calling in New York. She beats all such charlatans. Let me show you."

At a wave of the woman's hand Phera advanced and threw her hands above her head. Jasper Joyce could not help admiring the contour of the splendid arms as the loose sleeves fell back. The girl did not notice him.

"Phera will tell you where the clue is," said the dark-faced woman. "She will give you all the clues you want, that is, if you have not come too late."

"How too late, madam?"

Meantime the girl had become a statue on the carpet, her eyes lifted to the ceiling and her hands clasped.

"The power is to leave her soon, according to the prophecy. Phera is to be robbed by an unseen power and if all we have heard is true, the time is very near at hand."

The woman turned to the girl and said:

"What is on the ceiling, Phera?"

The bosom heaved, the hands seemed to get a firmer weld, and a tremor passed over Phera's frame.

"It is gone," cried the tall girl. "I see nothing. My God! The adder has stung!"

The cry rung through the house, the woman sprung up and ran to Phera.

"It is too late! An hour ago she was in splendid trim, but you have come too late. She has lost her mystic powers which she was endowed with on the island which gave her birth. There among the dark-skinned seeresses of tropics she was a wonder, but they told us that if she left the island she would lose the gift within a certain time. The limit has been reached."

Jasper Joyce looked at the girl who trembled from head to foot and saw that her face was as white as marble.

"Where is she from?" he asked.

"From the Island of Trinidad."

Why did Jasper Joyce start at the name? What made him rise and go toward the girl?

"From Trinidad?" he cried. "Are you from the same place, madam?"

"Yes."

It was like opening the book of mystery at a new chapter, and the New York spotter, recalling the Three Men from Trinidad—Jorrock, Pasca and Theron—felt his pulses rise.

"When did you leave the island?" he asked.

"Thirteen years ago."

"You were acquainted there?"

"Fairly well."

"And Phera here? Did she come away with you?"

"Yes, she was a child then; she is but twenty now. Phera, can't you see anything on the ceiling?"

"It is blank," was the reply. "It is white to me."

"You are too late, for the gift is gone. I am very sorry, for it was a wonderful sight to see her trace out dark paths on the ceiling and paint the faces of those who are the enemies of those before her. There was no one in the world like Phera."

The detective could not wait till the last words fell from the speaker's tongue.

"You have intimated that you know of my trail," said he. "You came to see me to-night. Was it to get me to come to your house and let Phera display her powers?"

"Yes."

"It has come back! It is with me again!"

These words came from the girl's lips, and again her hands rose above her head and she became a statue in the middle of the room as before.

"Thank Heaven!" cried the woman. "I thought it would never come back."

A moment's silence followed and both the ferret and the woman watched the girl who seemed to be gathering herself for a startling effort.

"Tell the gentleman what you see, Phera."

Before the girl could reply a noise at the window attracted all and the sash was raised by an unseen hand.

"Come here, girl," said a strange voice, and Jasper Joyce saw at the open window a face which thrilled him in every fiber.

It was a dark face covered almost to the eyes with a black beard whose glossiness was revealed by the light.

"Come here, I say!"

It was a command that sent a quiver through the lissom girl on the carpet.

She did not look at the woman, nor turn to the detective for assistance.

She walked to the window, as if under the spell of some infernal power, and the speechless detective saw her stop there within reach of the hand somewhere below the bearded face.

A second might have elapsed between the girl's stopping at the window and her turning back.

As she turned the face vanished and Phera came toward the table.

"'Tis he—'tis Jorrock!" cried the woman. "It was the captain of the Three."

As for Phera she smiled and looked toward the window, and when Jasper Joyce sprung across the room, the sash fell and the vision of the beard was gone!

All this was like a dream to both the woman and the detective.

Phera clasped her hands and smiled on until the detective touched her arm.

"What did he say?" he asked. "What said the man who called you to the window?"

Phera shook her head.

"If it was Jorrock, I know what was done," cried the woman. "He silenced Phera forever!"

Then she caught the girl and shook her almost rudely.

"You can't talk, can you, Phera?" she said. "You have been touched by the finger dipped into the dread silencer of Trinidad. You will never speak again, Phera."

"This cannot be! The girl has not been silenced by any one. She can speak and she shall!"

"Try her."

The woman fell back and left Phera in the ferret's hands.

Jasper Joyce was skeptical; he had witnessed strange proceedings in his career, but nothing like that. He had passed through adventures startling enough to try the courage of the coolest headed; but this one was beyond them all for mystery.

He addressed the white-faced girl and though she appeared to hear and understand, she did not reply.

He caught her arm and led her to the table where he put a pencil into her hand, saying:

"If the fiend has robbed you of speech, he hasn't destroyed your power to place your thoughts upon paper. What did he say and do at the window?"

"Phera is beautiful, but she can not write," said the woman. "She never had an education; in fact, she needed none while she had the gift which has vanished."

"Then, for heaven's sake, woman, tell me what you know about the man you called Captain Jorrock."

Phera had been abandoned for the time, and Jasper Joyce confronted the woman who had summoned him to the house.

"I know that he was Jorrock. I know that he is one of the Three; beyond that very little."

"You knew him in Trinidad?"

"I heard of him there."

"Do you know that on his back there is a mark?"

"Do I?" laughed the woman. "Let me ask you if it is anything like this?"

As she spoke she walked over to where Phera stood and delicately opened the girl's collar. Then she dexterously exposed one of the white shoulders and looked at the detective.

Jasper Joyce filled with eagerness crossed the room and looked.

"My God it is the same brand!" he exclaimed.

"The Dastard D?"

"Like the one which is on the backs of Jorroch, Pasca and Theron."

"Yes. Phera is a child of the brand; Phera is the outcast babe of the Brotherhood. She is a runaway, and always under the hand of the Three from Trinidad."

"But how came you to be her friend?"

"Fate and circumstances. Yes, Jasper Joyce, you came a little too late. Phera has been silenced forever. She has felt the hand of the Three, and you have looked into the eyes of Jorroch—merciless and crafty."

It seemed to Jasper that the curtain had fallen upon one act of the drama of crime and mystery, and as Phera, speechless still, swept from the room, his eyes followed her with a sort of farewell, deep and unexpressed.

CHAPTER X.

THE EXIT OF GASPARD MARKS.

THE next day quite early a woman who wore a veil came down Broadway and turned abruptly into Grand.

Her step was quick and nervous and she seemed eager to reach a certain place as soon as possible.

When in front of the building in which the detective had his "den" she stopped, made sure that she was right and entered.

She ran up the steps to Jasper Joyce's room, knocked and was told to enter.

Once across the threshold, she raised her veil and the man at the little table in the middle of the room rose and bowed.

Minon stood before the ferret.

She came forward with a smile at the corners of her mouth and a strange look in her eyes.

"I have come to you under some excitement," said she as she dropped into the chair opposite the spotter. "I trust I am calm now, but I must confess that I seem to feel my nerves tingle still."

"Something has happened, miss?"

"Something? We will call it that for want of a better name. I have lost Gaspard."

"What, has your servant ran away?"

"No, he is dead!"

Minon waited a moment for the detective to proceed, but as he did not, she continued:

"Gaspard died in a strange manner. He is even now sitting up in his chair in his room; but he will never wake again."

"This is very strange. You have told the police?"

"You first," smiled the girl.

Jasper rose and looked toward his hat.

"Who else knows that Gaspard is dead?" he queried.

"We are the possessors of the secret with the exception of the person who killed him."

"Gaspard has been murdered, then?"

"There's no doubt of that; there is a dagger sticking in his bosom."

"Oh!"

"You heard no one in the house last night?"

"No one."

"You sleep well, miss?"

"Very well. This morning I thought Gaspard was oversleeping himself, so I went up to summon him. I knocked, but no answer; then I opened the door and found him."

The detective was as eager to see the dead man as he had been to get something out of Minon by questions. He proposed to go back to the house on the avenue and the girl assented. Drawing her veil close, she followed him from the "den" and they took a car.

"They may not approve of my course, the police, I mean," said Minon with a smile. "But I thought of you the first

thing, and my conscience will sanction my act, which will satisfy me. Here we are."

They entered the house and Minon led the detective to the third landing.

"I disturbed nothing," said she, as she opened a door and looked over her shoulder at the man at her heels. "I looked in upon him, saw that he was dead, and went away."

Jasper Joyce passed into the apartment and looked as Minon stepped aside.

The rich morning sunshine pouring into the room showed him the seated figure of a man.

That death was in the eyes he knew at a glance, but it was not at the face he looked at most.

Sticking in his bosom, with the hilt displayed, was a dagger, the blade of which was out of sight.

"The hilt was a black one and in the end was a stone with a red color; beyond this it was not a strange bit of workmanship."

When he had looked at the picture of death a moment, the ferret loosened the man's collar and opened his clothes so as to expose the shoulders.

"It does not come through, does it?" asked Minon.

"No," said Jasper as he saw on the white skin of the man whiter on the back than in the face—the brand of a big "D."

Minon's curiosity impelled her forward, and the moment she saw it she caught the detective's arm.

"It was on *his* back, too. It was just like that."

"On whose back?"

"Gorell Grimm's."

"You saw it there, miss?"

"Yes, accidentally. I never told any one, but it was just like that mark—a capital 'D.'"

For some time the detective searched the room; he looked into Gaspard's trunk and at everything belonging to the dead man as Minon pointed them out to him.

"This is a case for the police now," said Jasper, as he turned away.

"And something for you, too?"

"Yes."

"Will you inform them, or shall I spread the news?"

"I would rather leave that to you, miss. You will act coolly and tell all you know."

"But nothing about the papers I intrusted to you?"

"Nothing about them at present."

That was all.

Jasper Joyce, confronted by a new mystery and another dark deed, left the house.

Half an hour later he turned up in Fourteenth street, and climbed the stairway leading to Zira's rooms.

But when he knocked, the place had a hollow sound, and a little girl who stuck her frowzy head from an adjoining room cried out that "the ledly" had moved.

Knowing at once that "the ledly" meant the very person he was looking for, the detective turned to the girl with a start.

"Where did she move to?" he asked.

"She went off without leaving any word."

"When did she go?"

"Last night, while mother was up with Benny."

"Where's your mother?"

"Here, sir."

A large woman presented herself in the door and looked at the ferret like a hawk.

"Was she behind with her rint?"

"Not that I know of; but I would like to see her."

"What was her name?"

"Zira."

"That's the first time I ever heard it, though we've neighbored for six months. She seemed to mind her own business. I was up last night with Benny. Green apples on market! She came out of the room and shut her door. I heard her say something, and I thought she was talking to some one. But when I opened my door a bit to see, I found that she was intirely alone and talking to herself. She said something about being a countess in fine feathers from now on, and that she had trumped one ace."

"Did she seem excited?"

"Not at all. She was as cool as I am this blessed minute; but her hands, they were shut tight, and when she went away she laughed."

"Did Violet call him by that name while he was in her house?"

"No, I heard her call him 'Miles,' but they didn't let me hear much, you see."

"I see," thought Jasper Joyce. "A link connects Zira and Gorell Grimm, who was

"Is the door locked now?"

"If it is I can open it for ye."

"Doso, madam."

The woman obligingly produced a key and the detective was admitted to Zira's room.

Sure enough the bird had flown. Zira, the Strange, had evidently decamped to come back no more as such.

She had left behind no clue for the keenest of detectives, and Jasper Joyce felt disappointed as he looked around and saw nothing to reward him.

Placing a dollar in the woman's hand, he departed.

"Merged for good into the countess, eh?" he said. "She may have struck the first blow for vengeance. As Zira, she seems to tremble at thought of the Tree from Trinidad; but as the Countess Violet, she possesses the nerve of the tigress."

The detective soon found himself far from the scene of his last adventure and in a dark quarter of the great city.

"Captain Jasper?" said a voice at his side, and the moment a hand touched him he looked down into the grinning face of Chatters.

"You're out early, boy," said the detective.

"I'm a lark, I am. Do you want me?"

"Yes."

"Come to the den, then. It's close by and just now I can give you audience. Man's at market and Poll's gone to the factory."

Chatters dodged down an alley with the ferret at his heels, opened a door and led his friend across the threshold.

"What's up, Jasper?"

The strange, but keen witted boy with folded arms leaned against a rickety table and looked at the detective while he waited for that worthy to speak.

"Chatters, you told me you remember about the countess and her manikins?"

"Yes, yes."

"You told me that she stood them against the walls and threw blades at them."

"I've seen her do that more than once."

"And you noticed the dagger?"

"Couldn't help it, Jasper."

"Would you know the dagger if you were to see it?"

"Wouldn't I?" grinned the boy spy. "I never forget a thing like that."

"Well, Chatters, you may tell me what it looks like—the one she throws at the manikin."

The boy took a long breath; his eyes seemed to bulge from his head and he smiled.

"It had a long blade and the handle was nearly black. When it struck, the hilt seemed to have a glitter I did not see till then."

"You mean that it seemed to have a polished termination?"

"Like a precious stone would make."

It was an apt description; it fitted exactly the dagger which he (Jasper Joyce) had seen in Gaspard Marks's breast.

"But why all this, Jasper?" asked the boy. "Let me turn questioner a little. You have discovered something. Is it about the countess and her dagger?"

"Perhaps, Chatters. But let me go on."

"All right, Jasper."

"Did you ever hear the countess talk about a man named Gaspard?"

The boy reflected a moment then slowly shook his head.

"Never about a Gaspard. It was Jorroch, Pasca and Theron."

"What sort of visitors does she have?"

"The Countess never has any."

"At no time, Chatters?"

"She had one—the only one I ever saw at the house since I entered her service."

"When was that visitor here, Chatters?"

"About a month ago."

"Was that your first and last sight of him?"

"No. I took him a letter from Violet."

"You took it to his house, did you?"

"I took it to the house occupied by a man named Grimm, and 'Gorell Grimm' was the name on the envelope as well as on the door-plate."

"Did Violet call him by that name while he was in her house?"

"No, I heard her call him 'Miles,' but they didn't let me hear much, you see."

"I see," thought Jasper Joyce. "A link connects Zira and Gorell Grimm, who was

'Miles Maccoon' to her. I am much obliged to you, Chatters, I think the dark lane is beginning to turn."

"In the right direction?" cried the boy spy. "I hope so, Jasper. I know that the Countess never pulled me from under a butcher's cart."

Jasper the ferret looked sadly at the boy.

"I'm sorry," he said to himself. "Chatters, my boy, while you may have given me a new link, you have forged a terrible chain for your strange mistress."

The city Javert was right; the lane had "turned."

CHAPTER XI.

FEAR FINDS A HEART.

MINON's story of the strange death of Gaspard Marks, was something new for the police and detectives of Gotham.

A man found dead in his chair with a dagger yet sticking in his breast was something out of the ordinary, and the mystery surrounding the affair heightened the excitement.

The police came and took away the deadly blade and the body was viewed by the proper officials.

People stopped in front of the house and looked at the closed shutters—to pass on a moment later with whispered comments, for the murder had spread like wildfire and all sorts of theories were in the wind.

As for Minon, the chief character in the dark little death drama, she remained shut up in the place, denying herself at last to the reporters who came. She passed from room to room, with lips well-knitted, and her face white, as if she were laboring under some fear or keeping a secret.

She felt that the detectives who had examined the premises had found no clue. They had questioned her and searched the house; they had seen the "D" on Gaspard's back; but it had told them nothing.

Minon could only conjecture what it had told Jasper Joyce, for she had not questioned him on that score. He had pulled down the man's clothes and showed it to her—the first intimation of its presence she had had.

Perhaps the girl wondered why the detective had not come back, for the day was passing and he had not returned.

Was he on the trail of Gaspard's slayer? Had he tackled the new crime, or was he still after the hand which had taken Gorell Grimm's life?

Perhaps the two trails would merge into one; perhaps they would come together, and in keeping on one, Jasper might reach the other and run down but one person after all.

The deepening shades of twilight found two men in a small room that overlooked a well-known street near the Brooklyn Bridge.

One held a newspaper in his hand and was looking over it at his companion.

"That tells the story well enough for the masses; but you see it leaves the whole thing a mystery," said one—a man with a glossy beard which reached to his black eyes.

"It is the black dagger at work. Any one can see that. It was a sure stroke, for look where the blade entered."

"He must have been taken unawares."

"Why so?"

"Look at the position when Minon, the girl, found the body. It was seated in a chair, 'as if in life,' says the paper. There were no signs of a struggle, and the theory of some is that he was asleep when the killer came."

"He never slept," was the quick retort. "He was as watchful as a fox, and when the papers say that he was taken in slumber they don't know what they talk about."

"But who could have overpowered him?"

"The master hand! In other words, he was attacked by his equal in cunning and the blow was as swift as a bullet."

"Look at the cut of the dagger. It is rude, of course, but it is suggestive. The red stone in the hilt is a point."

"It may or may not be a clue for some of these sharps who take the trails, or it may prove nothing at all."

There was no reply for a moment; the two men looked at one another, and the shadows out on the street blended until all was shade.

"They don't suspect the girl?" said one of the men at last.

"Pshaw! why should they? To her Gaspard Marks was the pink of faithfulness. He served her well and she never suspected."

"She heard nothing—"

"Which shows the craftiness of the slayer. That person came like a shadow and went like one. When she let herself out of the house there was a dead man behind her and the first stroke had been given."

"You talk positively. You call the slayer a woman."

The man who listened smiled and ran his hand through his black beard.

"You ought to know as much as I do, Theron," said he. "You ought to know that the hand of guilt points to but one person."

"I believe it."

"Look here! What does the black-handled dagger prove? Where did you ever see one like it? Let your thoughts go back; let them cross the warm wave to where we were boys together. Think a moment, Theron. We have seen daggers like that. It is not American, as this paper declares, and for once the reporter is right. It is a foreign blade and the stone in the hilt suggests some far-off land."

"I follow you, Jorroek."

"Then, why doubt for a moment who killed Pasca?"

"I know who did it, and it is our shame that the hand was permitted to deal the blow."

"We have warned her! When she goes back to the 'palace,' and as the Countess Violet plays again the role she has assumed, she will find the warning."

"Then, flight."

"As Zira, she fears; as Violet, she kills."

"I see. You would have me believe that this woman has two natures."

"She has."

"I never thought that of her in Trinidad."

"Then, you have not watched her as I have. You have not noticed her in repose and action. As Zira, she fears; as Violet, she slays."

The man called Theron, crossed the room to the window and stopped there.

He was followed by his companion whose eyes regarded him in silence and at last he spoke:

"They have seen the mark on Pasca's back and they have commented upon it," he said with a smile. "They take it up to prove that he was a foreigner, and a criminal."

"Yes. Were they to see certain other marks in existence they might be more mystified than ever. If they could see the delicate 'D' on Phera's flesh, what would they say?"

"Phera! She is silenced. It cost me a pang, but I had to do it. The girl will never see things on the ceiling for the viper in whose nest she lives."

Theron's face became clouded, and he turned away from Jorroek's searching gaze. How Jorroek watched him!

How he even leaned forward in his chair and scrutinized the man on the other side of the chamber—watched him with the eye of the tiger, while Theron stood near the window, apparently gazing down into the street, and oblivious of his surroundings.

"Theron?"

The man turned and came back to Jorroek.

"We are two now. The three links are broken."

"Yes."

"We know whose hand did it. It was the old oath we heard and even laughed at in the old castle on the island."

"I recall that night," and Theron smiled faintly.

"What is to be done, Theron?"

"What, but one thing—retaliation?"

Jorroek sprang from his chair and grasped Theron's hand.

"You have it! Retaliation! We must find the tigress and pay her back. Pasca was the first of the Three to feel her hand. If she is not found, one of us will be the second. The second, Theron."

"She must be found."

"As Countess Violet, or as Zira, she shall be found!" came from the half hidden lips of Jorroek. "In the name of the Brotherhood she shall be unearched! That will not be hard to do."

"No, the finding will not be so difficult as the real work."

"You doubt our ability?"

"Not that, brother," said Theron, laying his hand on Jorroek's shoulder. "You must not underrate this creature's power. You must not think that she will come boldly forth and stand in the way for us. No, no; you heard the oath. As Zira, we might easily overcome her; but she will be the Countess Violet from now on. My word for it, Zira has vanished!"

"Come, let us see."

The two strange men left the room and went down upon the street below.

Ten minutes later they turned up Fourteenth street and while Theron kept guard like a Cerberus below, the figure of Jorroek disappeared up a flight of steps.

At the end of five minutes he came back and touched Theron's arm.

"Zira has vanished," said he. "We have Violet to face."

A slight tremor seemed to sweep across Theron's frame.

They went off together, and returned to the room from which they had set out to find Zira the Strange.

Theron took a seat at the table and stroked his beard. Jorroek looked on a moment as if studying his friend's face, and at last he spoke.

"Nothing troubles you, Theron?"

"Nothing."

"You don't fear this woman?"

"Fear a woman?" and Theron laughed. "Fear this creature, washed up from the sea years ago? Jorroek, you misjudge Theron of the Branded D's."

"Forgive me," and Jorroek laid his hand on Theron's arm. "Pasca is dead. The sharps of New York are looking for the hand that handled the dagger; but we must distance them."

"She belongs to us."

"To us and not to the ferrets and the police of any city. This woman with two lives—this creature who, as Zira, trembles at our shadows but as Violet fears us not—must be hunted down. It is war to the knife!"

"What of the detective on the old trail?"

"Ah, yes. The man who went to the house after his departure and talked with Minon? Miles Maccoon, sleeping as Gorell Grimm, went first, but who thought that Pasca would follow him?"

Theron rose and looked down into the eyes of the man at the table. He drew his well-knit figure together and for half a minute watched Jorroek, who said nothing, but looked up with a singular light in his eyes.

"You know what is to be done, Theron?"

"Yes."

"She is no longer Zira. Keep that in mind."

"I'll forget nothing. She is Violet, the fearless. The one deadly stroke will nerve her hand for the next."

"But she may over-reach the mark. Come, Theron, we must act."

Theron left Jorroek alone in the little room. Outside the door he paused and looked back.

"There can be no escape, and when my time comes the accursed mark will not be found on my back."

He uttered these words in low tones, and then went down the stair.

Once in the street he seemed to court secrecy, for he pulled his hat over his eyes and hurried along.

When he opened a door and, locking it again, had thrown himself into a chair, with nothing but the faint light that struggled into the room from the lighted streets to show that he was at home, he looked like a man suddenly stricken by some terrible fear.

His face was colorless, his hands had lost their blood, and he seemed to have aged ten years since quitting Jorroek's room.

"It shall not be found upon me when the blow falls," he said aloud. "Jorroek need be none the wiser for the theft, and I know a man who is said to be able to do it. He will keep the secret, for he works for money, and I have plenty."

Theron changed his clothes and, changed in appearance, as well, crept from the room and vanished.

Fear had entered the heart of this cool,

man. He had been stricken with fright by the strange death of Gaspard Marks.

Some six squares from the house which he had left, he knocked at a door, and shuffling feet crossed the floor beyond.

"Come in," said a voice as the door opened.

Theron did so, and stood face to face with Nickum Nox, the Magic Chemist of Gotham.

The old man had not expected such a caller.

CHAPTER XII.

OLD NICKUM'S NEW SECRET.

Theron found Nickum Nox alone in his little laboratory.

The old man looked at his visitor as he came in and shut the door behind him.

Theron walked to the square table in the room and stopped.

The chemist waved him to a chair, and he took it with a slight bow.

"You are Professor Nox, the chemist?" said the strange man.

"I am—Nickum Nox, at your service."

The eye of Theron roamed around the room, and seemed to take in the various things it contained. One part of it was hidden by a curtain, and behind its folds were the chemical apparatus used by the old man.

"They tell me that you understand chemistry as no other man does."

"That is a compliment which I do not approve of. There are men who know secrets I have never reached."

"But you know more than the average chemist, and, what is just as good, you can keep secrets connected with your profession and your patrons?"

Theron was coming to the business that had brought him to the old man's place.

"A man who cannot keep the secrets of his trade, disgraces it," responded Nickum.

"That is right—he disgraces it, and I know that the man I address will never do anything of the kind."

"I have never been tried, perhaps," smiled Nickum Nox, as he ran his hands over his hard, smoothly shaven face.

"I have come to you on business. I would like to know in the first place if you can remove marks from the human body."

"Some marks, as you must know, go to the grave with their wearers."

"Yes—such as the scars of deep wounds."

"You are right. I see you know something about body-marks."

"But their are brands—marks placed on the body for many purposes. What do you do with them?"

"I take them off sometimes," said the chemist.

"Do you ever fail?"

"I have not failed yet."

Theron twisted uneasily in his chair.

"What passed between us shall be forever a secret?"

There was no reply.

The old man folded his hands and watched his visitor. He seemed to be debating a problem in his mind.

"I have money enough to pay you," continued Theron. "But I must swear to eternal secrecy before we proceed further."

"Oho, you have a job for me, then?"

"You will first make the examination and then report in my presence."

"Well, sir, you may proceed."

Theron started and caught Nickum's wrist.

"By the Most High! do you swear that while you live you will never give away the secrets of this night and this meeting?"

"Go ahead," said the chemist. "Your oath is as good as registered. I am at your service."

Theron rose and began to divest himself of his outer garments. He threw his coat and waistcoat upon a chair and pulled down his shirt so as to expose one shoulder and one half of his back.

Nickum Nox looked on with curiosity and said nothing.

"Now, sir, can you remove *that*?" suddenly cried Theron, whirling round and presenting his back to the old chemist. "I want your opinion and your skill."

Nickum bent forward to look at the object which Theron had exposed to his gaze.

It was not hard to see, for there on his own back was branded a large "D," as plain as the black letters of the alphabet!

For several moments Nickum Nox looked at the brand like a person rendered speechless by it, and as Theron said nothing, but kept his back turned, he was not molested.

At last the old man touched the "D" with one finger.

The skin was as smooth where it was as in any other place, and his fingers encountered no opposition.

For near five minutes the chemist examined the brand, and when he stepped back Theron turned with anxiety on his face.

"What can you do?" he asked.

"I can try."

"But you have told me that you never fail to remove marks on the human body."

The old man seem to grin.

"You forget, sir, that all marks are not alike. You were branded knowingly."

"What? Do you think I would willingly submit to the work of the brander?"

"Men often do. It is not a tattoo, but a brand. It was placed there at once—that is, it came complete from the tools."

"How know you that, sir?"

"My knowledge tells me something about these things."

"Yes, yes. I want to part company with that letter."

"You have fallen out with it, have you?"

"At last. You will remove it for me?"

"I will try. Sit down."

With his back still exposed, Theron took a chair while Nickum Nox went behind the curtain.

"I want it taken off to-night. There must be no stages in its removal."

"An urgent case, I see."

"It is nothing less than a very urgent case. I don't want to wake up in the morning with that letter on my back."

The old chemist came out from behind the curtain with two little vials in his hands.

"Do you eat such things out of a man's flesh?"

"Sometimes."

"Will I suffer?"

"No."

"I don't care if I suffer the tortures of the damned," was the reply. "I part company with that letter. Understand that."

Old Nox went to work. He had a patient sitter and one that kept silence while he applied the chemicals; and for twenty minutes not a word passed between the two.

"You must be my guest for a while," said he, at last, to Theron.

"For a week if need be."

Nickum unlocked a door at one side of the room and invited Theron to enter the chamber thus revealed.

"You will lie down till I call you," said he. "When you get up you and your old companion, the 'D,' may have parted company forever."

Theron threw himself upon the couch displayed in the light, and a minute later he saw indistinctly the figure of Nickum Nox as it vanished toward the laboratory.

"I will be shut of one bad mark when I quit this nest," thought he. "I will keep this from Jorroek as well as Nickum keeps the oath for me. Afterward I can face the woman when she turns on me and defy her to find on my back the mark of the Brotherhood."

Courage was coming back, and sinking into a deep slumber, he did not hear the old chemist's door open, nor see the man who came in.

The Night Hawk Detective stood at the little table and Nickum Nox, as cool as a man can be, talked with him in his usual tones, without betraying anything about the man in the next room.

"You have heard of the new crime?" said Jasper.

"The strange murder at Minon's house? The newspapers have told me a good deal, but I have been waiting for you, Jasper."

"This time you have nothing to tell me?"

"Nothing."

"You told me, you remember, that Gorell Grimm, *alias* Miles Maccoon, had been killed. This time death came to the same house and you were none the wiser till the papers enlightened you."

"It seems not."

"You know that on the back of Gaspard

Marks was found a 'D' like the one which I saw on Miles Maccoon's skin."

"Yes; I have read the accounts."

"I have seen the 'D' on another back since seeing you," said the detective.

"Then you have been on the trail?"

"I have been at work, of course. Would it startle you, Nickum, if I were to say that the 'D' is on the flesh of as fair a young lady as you have ever set eyes on?"

"Nothing startles me. I never thought that Minon's skin—"

"Minon does not wear the mark," interrupted the ferret. "Minon is not branded with the accursed letter, so far as I know. I have seen it elsewhere than on her back! You don't know Phera, do you, Nickum?"

"Phera? Is that another name for Zira?"

Jasper Joyce smiled.

"Far from it. Phera was a wonderful creature till a few hours ago. She could stand on the carpet and read strange things on the ceiling."

"Trance," cried the old chemist with a laugh. "One of those second sight beauties. But you lead me to believe that she has lost the gift."

"She has. She lost it at the hands of a fiend and in an instant, as it seemed. Do you know anything about a certain drug which can silence the human tongue in a moment?"

The eager face of the old chemist seemed to grow solemn at once.

He had been leaning with his elbows on the table, his face between his hands; but at the detective's question he fell back and looked at him from the depths of his chair.

"That's a queer question from you, Jasper," said he.

"I can't help it. I am liable to ask you stranger ones, Nickum. What do you say?"

"I have never made such things a study but sometimes in our lives we stumble upon secrets—actually stumble upon them, you know."

Jasper nodded.

"As to this agent, I know but little. It is said to exist among the West Indies—and from what I have heard of it, its secret is confined to few people."

"It renders one speechless, does it?"

"Suddenly and forever, so 'tis said," smiled the old man.

"I witnessed the application, and the person rendered speechless by it wears on her fair skin the brand of the letter 'D.'"

Perhaps at that moment Nickum Nox thought of the man in the next room, for he sent a swift glance toward the locked door and afterward turned deliberately to the detective.

"And you call her Phera?" he said.

"Yes."

"Where does she live?"

"She lives with a woman who sent for me and who wants to give me a clue to the trail through the wonderful girl. Phera was ready to read the ceiling for me, but the window was raised and she was called thither by a voice she dared not disobey."

"Called away and touched, eh?"

"Yes."

"And you saw the man?"

"I saw a dark bearded face and a pair of black eyes."

"It's a pity—for the girl," said Nickum Nox. "If she has been touched by the dread silencer, the skill of science will be of no avail to bring back her voice."

"I feared so. I would know the face if I were to see it again. I have seen it before. I saw it in the Countess Violet's house. I know that I am to hunt down that man and his companion—that the trail of the first crime leads to them, while the last one—the one which starts out from the chair in which Minon found Gaspard Marks—leads to another."

"The papers are full of that murder," said the old chemist.

"And some have a theory that the hand that dealt the blow belonged to a woman."

"You think so too, Jasper?"

The detective moved toward Nickum Nox and lightly touched his hand resting on the table.

"I almost know that it does," he replied.

At this moment a noise seemed to come from the little room adjoining the laboratory, and the Magic Chemist looked toward it, but kept his head.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MAN AT THE WINDOW.

At identically the same time but in another part of the city already visited in the course of this story a woman reclined on a rich sofa with a boy posed before her.

The apartments of the room were luxurious in the extreme, the rugs being tiger-skins, and the bric-a-brac various and quaint.

The boy was Chatters, and while he stood in front of the sofa he was looking at its occupant who had just addressed him.

"I am going away for a time, Chatters. I shall be gone perhaps three days, and you will come hither occasionally to see that the house is kept in order."

"I will come," replied the boy.

"There may be no callers while I'm gone," continued the woman, who was Zira, or the Countess Violet. "I don't think your visits will be disturbed."

"When you come back will it be to stay here?"

"Perhaps. You like the house, do you, Chatters?"

"It is very rich. There can be few nicer houses in the city."

A sigh escaped the woman's lips and she looked at the walls for a moment.

"When are you going off?" asked the boy.

"To-night—within a few minutes," and she consulted her watch which she took from her belt.

"Then, the carriage will come for you?"

"No, there will be no carriage to-night. I will go off without that ceremony, but I will go all the same."

She dismissed the boy after telling him again to visit the house at frequent intervals during the next three days, if she did not come back sooner, and handing him some bills, she swept into another room and closed the door.

Chatters, feeling that he was not needed any longer, was about to quit the room, when he noticed something on the rug alongside the sofa.

With boyish curiosity he stooped and picked it up, to hold in his hand a dark stone which shone in the light.

Chatters eyed this with intense curiosity, but let it fall from his hand as a sound came from the room into which the woman had vanished, and falling back as if caught in the act, he slipped down to the parlor.

"Why not?" said he to himself when he gained the street. "Why not see which way she goes?"

He withdrew to the shade of some trees and waited—his gaze riveted on the house.

Presently the front door opened and a female figure came down the steps. Chatters saw that a veil covered the face and that Violet had changed her garments.

"No carriage, sure enough," murmured the boy spy. "The Countess has something in hand else she would not slip off in that manner."

He dogged her to the corner which she turned and then as if his curiosity could not be held in leash he followed on and on till they had descended into a quarter of New York well known to Chatters, but of which he would not have believed Violet knew anything.

Violet stopped in front of a house and rung.

The door opened and the boy saw her enter; then it was closed and all was still again.

"That's the way she goes off, is it?" thought Chatters. "What would Jasper say if he were here? What would he say to Zira, the Countess, leading one a chase like this?"

Chatters had not seen enough. He wanted to see what Violet did in that house, and to effect this, he slipped to the rear of the premises and crept to the back door.

But all at once he stopped as if he had found a coiled snake in his path.

Against the window alongside the door was something dark, and it had already grown into the figure of a man.

Chatters's heart rose in his throat, but a moment later he made the welcome discovery that as yet he had not been seen by the spy.

It took no time for him to fall back and from a safe distance regard the man at the window.

"It is not Jasper," said the boy. "He is

not playing spy on the Countess. Another is at work and it may be some one who is her enemy."

The figure at the window moved not.

The longer Chatters watched it the deeper seated became his belief that Violet was in danger.

"I can post her. I can tell her about the man behind the house and she will forgive me for following her to-night."

The nimble boy made his way back to the street and his tanned fingers jerked the bell.

"I want to see the lady who came in awhile ago," said Chatters as the door opened.

"No lady came in."

The boy was thunderstruck.

"But I saw her," he persisted.

"Indeed, you have the impudence of a real street snipe. I tell you no one came in. Get out!"

The door was shut in Chatters's face and he reeled stunned from the step.

What should he do?

He looked at the house and saw that the shutters were drawn, and that not a ray of light indicated that it was inhabited at all.

"I must get to the Countess," he cried.

"The man at the window means mischief. She must be warned!"

Again he laid his hand on the knocker, but hesitated.

"You here yet?" cried the woman who made her appearance. "I told you once for all—"

Chatters darted past her and found himself in the hall.

"I must see her," he cried as the woman came toward him with blazing eyes. "I must see the Countess, for a spy is lurking near!"

"What's that?" and his arm was seized.

"A spy? Where is he?"

"First, where is Violet?"

"Not in this house."

"But she came in; I saw her."

Chatters found that he was in the grip of an Amazon who held him against the wall while she seemed ready to rend him in her rage.

"Where is the spy, boy?"

Before Chatters could reply some one came into the hall and he uttered a cry.

It was the Countess Violet.

She recognized Chatters with a cry and sprung forward.

"It is my boy," she said, addressing the other woman. "What is it, Chatters?"

"There's a spy at work. He is now leaning against the window in the back-yard."

Both women started and the hand of Violet half drew a dagger as she started back.

"I have been tracked!" she said.

"No, he was there when I went back to the place where I almost ran against him."

"We are lost."

"Lost with what we have with us?" cried Violet. "Where is this spy? At the back window?"

The Countess Violet threw open the door leading from the hall and stalked like a lioness toward the window in question.

Chatters saw her throw up the sash and open the shutters.

"Not here," she said turning upon the boy and the woman who had regarded her with breathless attention. "There is no spy here."

"But he was there."

Something bright glittered along Violet's sleeve. She fastened the sash and stepped from the window, the glitter of that something remaining for half a second in the light she left.

A minute had not elapsed ere she came back, a smile on her face and her right hand empty.

"He is gone. The spy, if the boy saw one, is not outside, but—something was there."

"How know you that?"

"Marks in the dust underneath the window."

"Then, we have been watched."

Violet lowered the sash and led Chatters from the room.

"Never again follow me from home," she said, looking down into the upturned face.

"No matter if a thousand enemies are on my track, never play spy on your mistress."

Chatters promised that he would not, and

half dazed by his adventure, he was led to the door and gently thrust outside by the Countess.

"Not if she has a thousand foes at her heels," said Chatters. "She's a queer one. Doesn't want to be told that spies are abroad, yet, when I warn her, she goes and looks for them. Well, maybe I'll take you at your word, Countess, I'll keep what I see to myself and Jasper after this."

Chatters half expected to be seized by a silken hand as he moved away from the house; but he was not molested, and some time later he was at the door of Jasper Joyce's den.

It was late now and one-half the city was still.

As the boy spy crept up the steps he had wondered if he would find the detective at home and a knock told him that the ferret was out.

So he leaned against the wall of the corridor and waited.

"It's a queer case all round," muttered Chatters. "It's got the elements of mystery which Jasper likes, but, it looks to me like it's getting a little too deep even for him."

Midnight passed and the boy was still at the portal.

At last a sound came up from below.

"Coming home at last," said Chatters, opening his eyes and rousing himself. "My story hasn't spoilt and he'll listen to it with eagerness as he does to nearly everything I have to spin."

But the expected tread did not come up to the door. It seemed to die away down in the darkness of the lower hall, and after a while Chatters crept to the edge of the landing and looked down.

"Jehosaphat!" he cried. "There's a man down there."

His first impulse was to run down and see who it was, but he held back and looked. The light was just dim enough to prevent identification, and it puzzled Chatters while he stared.

But his curiosity got too great for him; he slipped down the steps and at last stood on the floor below.

He approached the prostrate figure on the carpet, but all at once he stopped as if he had been touched.

The man was on his feet.

As if controlled by an electric current, the fallen one had leaped up, and as Chatters fell back, he saw him spring to the door, open it and shoot out into the night.

It was not Jasper Joyce, that was certain, and all Chatters had to recall was a black beard and the nimbleness of a deer.

The boy, staggered by the sudden flight of a supposed dead man, did not follow, but stood nonplused in the corridor.

He was called back to the present by the sudden opening of the door, and Jasper Joyce stared at him as he came in.

"Just a minute too late," cried Chatters.

"But of course, you saw him?"

"I saw no one, Chatters."

"But the man who went out of the house like a ball from a gun? I thought him dead, for he lay on the floor here till I was about to touch him when he was up and off like a rocket."

The detective maintained that he had seen nothing and Chatters's wonder increased.

"Come up-stairs," said the ferret. "Now that I have found you, I have something to say."

Jasper and his little protege were soon in the room above and as the detective took a seat at the table he waved Chatters to a chair.

"Where's the Countess, Chatters?" asked Jasper.

There was no reply.

"She is not at home," continued the ferret.

"I have just come from there. Chatters, my boy, I am going to deal openly and fairly with you from now on. You have been serving a dangerous woman. You have been playing page to a murderess."

The boy was on his feet in a moment.

"Well, didn't you say when I told you about her throwing knives at the manikin that it was war to the knife? But if she has killed any one, I'll bet my head that she has cause."

"That will come out in the sifting. Where will I find the Countess just now, boy?"

CHAPTER XIV.

IN JORROCK'S LAIR.

THE man seen by Chatters in the hallway of the house in which the detective lodged missed the city ferret by a hair, as it were.

A few seconds later and the two men would have collided in the lamp-light and a part of this story remain unwritten.

The stranger pursued his way, keeping in the shadows as much as possible and pulling up at length before a house into which he let himself with a night-key.

He was at home. On the second floor he opened a door and turned on the gas, then threw hat and coat upon a bed and dropped into a chair.

Half a minute later he was smoking as complacently as though he had not essayed the role of burglar, nor been seen in the house of the New York detective.

"I didn't think the old spell would come back," he said. "I had hoped that the old poison had spent its force in my veins, and that I would no more be troubled with the spasm. But it came when I didn't want it to come on, and I fell in the very place where I needed cool nerves and a clear head."

This dark-bearded man was Jorroek, the man who with Theron had discussed the death of Gaspard Marks, whom they called Pasca; and while he smoked with his heels on the table he looked as handsome as ever, and not very dangerous despite the blackness of beard and eyes.

"We will soon be able to play with the sparklers," he went on, rising with the cigar between his teeth. "We will soon have everything to our liking, but Pasca won't be with us to share the profits of the long game."

He crossed the room and touched a small button in the wall. A door moved to one side and Jorroek thrust in his hand. A moment later he pulled it out and held up a packet.

With this he went back to the table and resumed the seat.

Here he opened the packet and poured out upon a bit of chamois-skin a handful of diamonds some of which were marvelously large and beautiful.

"What will they say when they come to compute Gorell Grimm's wealth? Pastel! Where there were diamonds nothing but paste remains, thanks to Pasca and his knowledge of such things."

Jorroek held the jewels in his dark hands and admired them. He poured them from one hand to the other and smiled as they scintillated in the light. Wonderful stones they were, rich enough to blaze on the bosom of royalty, or shine in the show-window of the greatest diamond house in the world; but they were in the dark hands of Jorroek.

"Why don't Theron come?" he said looking up. "There are but two of us now, and the division will be greater when we have played the game out. This enemy—this woman with the double life—is playing her hand and Pasca felt it. Wait! Wait till Jorroek and Theron trump her ace; then see the hand vanish!"

After awhile he put the diamonds out of sight, and stood erect in the middle of the room.

"Thirteen years from Trinidad," he cried. "Thirteen years from the old life, all of which have been spent in the United States and under its flag. I begin to think of going back—back to the groves and the sands of Trinidad. Back to its venomous serpent and its lurking slaves. We were happy there till we felt within our blood the demon that afterward enslaved us."

"Would I go back if I could? Would I return to Trinidad with its fevers and death? Where is Pasca? At the morgue! Where is Miles Maccoon? Over yonder where thousands sleep. And this fair-faced girl he left behind—Minon, the adopted, who thinks she has at her command the ransom of a queen in diamonds innumerable—will soon blossom out as his heiress, to discover that, thanks to Pasca, her wealth is paste and her diamonds dust."

He laughed till the room rung with his voice and he threw the cigar into the receiver to take up another.

"Zira came, too. She came to New York

at our heels and, as Zira, she feared us; but as Violet she seems imbued with the passion of a Tigress. Pasca knows. Theron and I will know if we don't checkmate her. The detective is at work, but we can fight him off. No ferret can outwit the Brothers from Trinidad. If we fear any one it is that woman with the black-handled dagger. It is Zira, the Stranger."

Jorroek grew calm again. He went back to the table and smoked away, now and then taking a new cigar from the box.

The long night waned and he was alone still.

As impassioned as ever, he leaned back in the chair with his dark eyes blinking as he smoked, and his face as imperturbable as before.

When the door-knob turned at last, he saw it.

Theron came in.

"I've been waiting," said Jorroek. "I have seen her."

With a smile on his face a little paler than usual Theron came forward and stood at the table.

"You have seen the Countess, have you?"

"Yes. I was at a window and saw her. She is the same tigress. I tell you, Theron, we must strike once more."

There was no reply; the face of Theron remaining as sphinx-like as ever while Jorroek continued:

"They will bury Pasca to-morrow, for they are done with him, the doctors are. We might claim him, but the time will come when we will erect a shaft to him, but not in this country."

"In Trinidad," said Theron.

"Where we were raised and where we belong. Zira has gone to Phera's friend."

"Not to madam?"

"Yes."

"Did you see her there?"

"I did and she came to the window with the dagger in her hand, but the bird had flown, ha! ha!"

Both men laughed.

"I wonder if she got the warning we left in her tiger-adorned room?" asked Theron.

"Undoubtedly," was the reply.

"Then she knows."

"She knows that she is doomed. She knows, too, that the detective will not come between her and the Dastard D's, as they call us. Violet has not gone to Madam for assistance, but to see Phera."

"But she will be too late."

"Too late!" smiled Jorroek. "We have been ahead of the woman with the dagger. Our old enemy will hear nothing from the lips of this silenced girl. Phera is out of the game."

"She was pretty."

"So is the little green snake that hangs from the bushes in old Trinidad and bites to kill."

"There was something queenly about the girl—"

"But she was too dangerous, brother. She was in our road and I had to touch her."

"It is all right. I find no fault, but I hate the cause."

"Violet? Of course."

"Theron did not reply."

"Where have you been?"

"I have been out. I did not expect to remain away so long. The streets are as deserted as a desert."

"You will smoke, brother. It is but a short time till morning now."

As Theron's hand crossed the table to select a cigar something fell upon the cloth and was seen by Jorroek at once.

It was a button and the moment it caught Theron's eye he turned pale.

"Your collar-button, brother," said Jorroek.

Theron picked it up and put it away but his pallor still remained.

"I must tell you," continued Jorroek. "The old fit came back on me to-night."

"Not the old poison spasm?"

"Yes, I felt it in my blood, and it came so suddenly that I could not resist. You saw me have one on shipboard—how I fell and lay like a dead man on deck?"

"Yes."

"Well it was so to-night."

"Where were you, Jorroek?"

"At work," significantly replied the Dastard D. "I was in the lion's den."

"Do you mean in the detective's house?"

"I was there when the fit came on. I was in the hall and I fell like one struck dead. I went thither to search the home of the searcher. We have lost the papers—the documents which Miles Maccoon wrote out, and for which Pasca searched the house. I intended to ransack the detective's den—"

"What if you had encountered him?"

A sudden flash lit up Jorroek's eyes.

"I had looked at everything. I had counted all the costs and I entered the den with my eyes open."

"But you found nothing?"

"The accursed spasm spoilt all," was the growled answer. "Who would think that the venom of that little serpent remains so long in the human system, bringing on these strange fainting fits after the interval of years? But I knew I was in for it the moment my blood got cold. I went down and lay there till all was over when I sprang up and darted for the street just in time to prevent being examined, if not robbed, by a boy."

"It was mad luck," said Theron.

"It was the devil's fortune," smiled Jorroek.

"Perhaps you would not have found anything in the detective's room?"

"You know what Pasca said? She gave him something. That something must be those documents."

"But they may not be there."

"Time will tell. Miles Maccoon drew up those papers. He was an artist, to the curse of the Brotherhood, and his sister—"

"You mean the Countess Violet?"

"Give her the title she has worn to the complete hoodwinking of her neighbors! She always was a queer girl. You remember, Theron, how, as the little child of the island, she ran from a spider, but how as a maid, she could tread upon a rattlesnake and crush it beneath her heels?"

"Her two natures," said Theron. "She has lived them in this city, one in Zira the other in Violet."

"That is true. As Violet we must meet her from now on. Zira is not to be feared. When did you see the old chemist last?"

If a thunderbolt had fallen upon the table at that moment Theron of Trinidad would not have started more than he did.

When had he seen Nickum Nox last?

He recalled, as he seemed to sweat blood, the last scenes at the old man's den—how he had submitted to the removal of the Dastard D, and how he had sneaked out of the place, vowing to keep from Jorroek the results of that visit.

"Why do you ask me?" asked Theron. "Do you think I have business with the Magic Chemist?"

"Not that, but we may need him by and by. He is skillful. There may come a time, Theron, but not until the oath has been fulfilled to the very last letter, when we may want to stand unbranded—when we may want to go back to the island, without the 'D' upon our backs. Old Nox is an adept at removing brands and birth-marks. He can keep a secret, which is better still, and under his care we may be able to have skins as clean as any one's."

Theron enveloped his face in a cloud of smoke and Jorroek did not see the expression which came to it.

"But remember, Theron, there is to be no escape from the mark until after the game has been played through—till we have no enemies to track us down, and till there lives none but ourselves to carry in their bosom the dread secret of the Brotherhood of Trinidad."

"I never forget."

"You know the penalty. The oath taken by Jorroek, Pasca and Theron holds good, though Pasca is no more. The man who rids himself of the sign of the Brotherhood before the end is to feel the hand of the others. If I let this avenging woman make a coward of me to the extent of getting rid of the 'D,' you shall rid the world of Jorroek."

Theron felt drops of cold sweat on his forehead; and that moment he cursed the ardor he had shown.

CHAPTER XV.

TOGETHER the two men waited for the morning and when it came Theron picked up his hat and went out.

"He won't fail me," said Jorroek, as he watched the vanishing figure of his friend. "We are but two now, and the dagger lurks for our hearts. The hand that slew Pasca at his post of duty will seek us, and if it can it will slay with the same degree of vengeance and savage fury."

Theron wandered from street to street like a man in a maze. He seemed to feel that he had transgressed the law of the Brotherhood by having the Dastard "D," removed, and he could not go back and confess to Jorroek.

Meantime, the detective, the clever man of Grand street, was at work again.

He wanted to find the Countess Violet, or Zira, as he sometimes called her, and he now bent all his energies to this task.

Chatters, when found, could only tell him what had passed between him and his mistress, and that Violet had gone off, though he had tracked her to a certain house in the city where he had seen a spy on the watch.

Jasper Joyce recognized the house from the boy's description and thought he would find Violet at the home of Phera, the marvelous girl who had been silenced in his presence by the touch of a hand.

At any rate, the game was worth the candle.

While Theron with his head in a strange whirl was debating what to do, Jasper was on the trail of the Countess.

The police, puzzled still over the mysterious death of Gaspard, were trying to sift the matter to the bottom, and the detective with the same resolve arrived in the vicinity of Phera's home.

He stopped near the house as he saw the front door open and a veiled figure come out.

Was it Zira? Had he found her at the very outset of the new run?

This person looked cautiously on all sides ere she moved off, and seeing that everything was apparently safe she came toward him with agile step.

There was something about her to indicate that he had found the Countess and the detective followed the moment the figure had passed him.

The morning was pleasant and the sun was just touching the pavements of Gotham.

Safe at last, as she thought, she soon fell to walking more leisurely, and the ferret had no difficulty in tracing her.

It was surely Zira!

All at once the tracked one dodged into a narrow street with the tracker at her heels and suddenly opened a door and vanished.

Jasper Joyce was satisfied. All he had to do was to enter after her and stand face to face with the wanted woman.

"She cannot escape me now," said he, as he neared the house, and almost before the sound of the closing door had died away the ferret's hand was at the knob and he pushed it open.

In the hall he found no one and it was filled with shadows.

"She's not far. In fact, Zira can't elude me in this house, and, then, she did not know that she was tracked."

He passed to the end of the corridor where there was a door, opened it and stood face to face with—Phera!

The expression that came to Jasper Joyce's face at this was ludicrous.

He looked at the tall, handsome girl as he fell back and watched the color come and go on her face.

Phera was startled as much as the detective, and for half a second she appeared to be about to spring past him and try to reach the street.

But instead she drew herself up and seemed to inquire what had brought him to that house at her very heels.

"You are not to be harmed," said Jasper. "I did not intend to track you, Phera; but you are not the only person in this house."

Of course there was no reply, and the girl put one finger to her mouth and looked.

Jasper understood; the spell of silence was still on and she could not speak.

Suddenly Phera caught his wrist and led him into an adjoining room where she turned upon him and smiled.

In another moment she caught up a bit of paper from the table and seemed about to communicate something when she hesitated and threw it down again.

"Go on," cried the detective. "Write what you were about to put into language. You were going to answer me. Don't be afraid."

Phera dropped into a chair and covered her face with her hands.

"You dare not. Is that it?" asked Jasper Joyce. "What keeps back that which you would reveal? Tell me, Phera, and no harm shall come to you."

The girl did not move, but a tremor passed over her body. She appeared to have fallen into a stupor and the detective watched her for ten minutes while she remained at the table like a piece of statuary.

"Come, this will not do," he said at last, touching her gently. "We are alone here and the dread hand will not touch you any more."

Phera looked slowly up and encountered the eyes of the man who stood beside her.

Her gaze wandered to the floor and Jasper Joyce interpreting it, picked up the sheet of paper and placed it beside her. He saw her hand draw it forward, and the next moment she had taken up a pencil and was writing slowly. Madam had said that she could not write; but Madam did not know.

Jasper leaned forward and looked down over her shoulder watching the moving pencil with bated breath.

"I am under the ban," wrote Phera. "You cannot know the depths of crime to which the Brotherhood have descended, and you cannot realize that I—Phera—belong to it."

"If that is true, the very reason why you should betray the infamous order and let Justice get her dues."

A singular look came to Phera's eyes and she shook her head.

"I am a guilty fugitive now," she wrote. "I have abandoned the clan. I have fled from the house that has sheltered me for years and I— My God! pity me."

She dropped the pencil again and her head fell forward on the table as she covered it again with her hands.

"You mean that you have fled from the Hand that deprived you of speech?" he said.

There was a slight nod and Jasper continued:

"You know, then, what has happened. You know what has taken place in the house on Eighth avenue? You have heard that two deaths have closed its shutters, and you—"

Phera sprang up and pushed him away.

She looked regal as she stood in the middle of the room, her black eyes flashing and her face as white as a snowy peak. Jasper Joyce instinctively shrunk from the girl as if she were mad, but after a spell, or when she seemed to have recovered some, he ventured to approach her again.

"You know," said he as he caught her eye. "You know who killed Miles Maccoon, sometimes called Gorell Grimm. You know, too, who silenced Gaspard Marks, for, if you belong to the Brotherhood of Trinidad, you must know its secrets."

There was no reply of any kind; Phera standing on her carpet, looked at the detective with eyes that seemed to read his very thoughts.

"If you cannot speak," said he, "can't you read the ceiling and record the vision on paper?"

She did not move.

"Come. It is worth trying," and he caught up the paper and pressed the pencil into her hand. "You can see as before though they have 'touched' you. You can see what is on the ceiling here, and your hand shall tell it all."

She took the pencil with resolution and appeared ready to carry out the detective's suggestion; but all at once she flung it down and shook her head.

"You will not?" cried Jasper Joyce. "You do not want to see the guilty punished, but rather would remain in the net and reap the whirlwind of your own folly."

Phera stamped her foot on the floor and shut her hands.

"If you will not tell me anything, I shall go out and hunt down those whom you may

love. You know that the Countess Violet came to your home last night. You know that she was watched by a man at the window. What happened after that?"

The tall girl seemed delighted.

For the third time she seized the paper and stepped to the table.

"I have touched her at last," thought the detective. "I have unlocked the door of Phera's heart."

For three minutes she wrote rapidly. Her hand seemed to fly over the sheet and Jasper had difficulty in following it as it traced the sentences there.

"I thought so," he cried, exultantly, but not aloud. "I have caught her at last."

Phera wrote without looking up, only now and then pausing as if at a loss for a word, and when she stopped at last she pushed the paper toward Jasper and sunk back exhausted.

The detective read:

"You ask me for too much. I cannot tell you all, but you should know something. The hand that slew Gaspard Marks did not kill Miles Maccoon. The knife took the life of one, the secret poison of the tropics that of the other. They know that you are on the trail, and you will be stung if you don't play a finer hand than you play now."

"The Countess Violet knows you and so does Jorroek, the head man of the dread Brotherhood. Pasca is dead, for the avenger from the shades of the Caribbean Island found him at the post of duty. You will be found; you will be hunted down by the two brothers of Trinidad, and the silent agent of death will find you when you know it not. There is no escape from this dread silence. It can deprive one of the powers of speech, or take life. You know nothing of its workings, shrewd as you are. I am but Phera to you; but I am more to others. I first saw the sunlight on a wave-washed shore, and I became a member of the dread circle in my cradle."

"Don't ask me why I fly from the shadow of death. I have a right to quit the roof under which I have been happy all these years, and where I could read the signs of peril on the ceiling by the strange gift the gods gave me at birth; but now the power has departed, and I am as silent as the dead. You must turn upon Jorroek and Theron if you want to escape. You must seize and chain the Tigers from the Caribbees if you do not want to feel in your blood the tide that flows toward death. Ask me not concerning Violet."

"There was a time when she was a happy creature. She became tigress all at once when she saw the hand of the Trinidad Brotherhood touching one whom she loved. She has two names; but you seem to know both. As Zira, she fears the Brotherhood; but as Violet she is its greatest foe. Which one will you track—which one do you want—Zira or Violet?"

The hand of the writer stopped and her gaze was upturned to the detective.

As Phera leaned back in the chair she appeared to feel conscious of having done her duty, for she no longer trembled and her color gradually came back.

"Which one?" said Jasper, as he bent toward her. "I want the woman who killed Gaspard Marks."

"Then," answered the tall girl, "then, sir, you don't want Zira."

"I believe that Zira is the coward, Violet the tigress."

The girl nodded.

"Tell me now who Madam, your friend, is. You have been living with her, but you say that you have fled from the house. She knows something about Jorroek, Pasca and Theron. Who is Madam, Phera?"

"No, not that secret," wrote the white hand. "You cannot drag that one from me. I will tell you much; but there my hand stays itself."

"We will not discuss this question, then. You are not going back to Madam's?"

"I am not!"

"You have fled from the shadow of death?"

"It is not that," and Phera paused a moment; but all at once she wrote: "Is she pretty?"

Jasper Joyce started at the abruptness of the query. He had not expected anything of the kind.

"You understand me. Is Minon pretty?"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LEAF FROM THE PAST.

MINON!

For some time the detective had not thought of the fair girl shut up in the house of mystery.

"She is very lovely," he said to Phera, at last. "Minon is as pretty as one can be. Did you ever see her?"

"No," wrote the hand on the table. "I have never seen Minon save in my strange visions on the ceiling, and there she floated in a mist. She has black eyes, has she?"

"Yes, black and deep."

"And a graceful figure?"

"She is very graceful. You would like her, girl."

"Me like her?" wrote Phera. "You cannot mean that. Why should I like Minon?"

"You would soon become friends."

"Has she a lover?"

"I do not know."

"But you say she is beautiful."

"Yes, but—"

"Then she must be in love," and a smile appeared at the girl's mouth. "But Minon is in the shadow, too. The silencer found Gorell Grimm; why should it not find her as well? She is his heir."

"I know that, but Minon is a girl."

"Just as if the Brotherhood of Trinidad respected sex," wrote the hand.

Jasper was eager to get back to other subjects, and he said:

"What was the real cause of Gorell Grimm's death, girl. You wear the brand of the Brotherhood."

She sprung up like one suddenly touched with an electric probe, and for a moment she stood before the detective with her face white and her hands in a tremor.

"That is for you to discover," she wrote, suddenly going back to the table and writing rapidly. "You are a detective and are on the trail. You have the Brothers of Trinidad to fight and if you win, the secret is yours."

"Then it shall be mine," cried Jasper. "You shall not be molested here by me, Phera. This house shall become your asylum. I trust the silencer will not find you again. If I can prevent he will not."

"But you cannot prevent. I have tried to hide from the shadow, but it falls across my path all the same. Tell no one, though, where I am. Let me rest here in this house which belongs as much to me as to any one. Let Phera, the Silent, live in peace away from the dreaded clan for a while."

"It shall be so," and Jasper held out his hand. "Good-by, girl."

His fingers were touched by the cold hand of Phera, and then he turned away, leaving her standing in the middle of the room with her large, lustrous eyes following him to the door.

Jasper Joyce, once more on the street, hurried off. He had learned something from Phera, but not much. He had tracked the wrong woman down; but she had kept the real secret in her heart.

He went back to the den on Grand street.

Shutting the door behind him, he was about to light a cigar when steps came toward the portal and the next instant it opened.

The man who came in at once caught the detective's attention.

It was "Professor" Nickum Nox.

The old man came forward with his hat in his hand, and when near the table he threw the tile upon it and took a chair.

It was still early morning and the sunlight had barely reached the room.

"Thought I would drop in early," said the old chemist. "I don't know when to find you here any more, and I thought I would try the early hours."

"Then you're in luck, Nickum," responded the detective. "I have just come back."

"Been out, eh? You weren't going all night, I hope?"

"Not quite," smiled Jasper. "You look like you've enjoyed at least ten minutes' sleep."

"Precious little more than that. But that's nothing new for me, Jasper."

The old man looked up at the detective and smoothed the cloth with his brown hand.

"What have you found out?" he asked.

"About the first trial or the last one?"

"We'll say about the first."

"It is still in the dark and the links are not so readily found as those of the second murder."

"You mean the killing of Gaspard Marks?"

"Yes."

"There was something to go on there," Nickum Nox. "There was a dagger in the body and you have seen it."

"I have seen the dead man, too. I was the first man on the scene, and the police don't know yet that I was there and looked over the ground before they heard of the crime."

"You're always the first, Jasper. I like you for that. They don't pick you up when it comes to shrewdness in a case of this kind. You say that the clues are still in the dark?"

"Yes."

"But that those of the other crime are not so much shaded? A dagger tells a good deal sometimes, but when you know that a man has been killed and when there are no visible signs of death on the body, you are puzzled. Well, I don't wonder."

"Gorell Grimm was killed—I firmly believe that—and I also believe that Minon saw the slayer that night."

"You have told me about her adventure. She saw a man enter the library and he seemed to mesmerize her while she hugged the shadows along the staircase."

"Exactly."

"Minon gave you a very graphic description of her adventure, no doubt."

"She did. The girl is clear-headed and can tell what she knows quite graphically."

"She must have seen some one that night."

"She certainly did. But she believes that she was spelled in some manner by that person whoever he was, and that he was the man who helped Gorell Grimm or Miles Maccoon out of the world."

"I believe it," cried Nickum Nox. "Not because you do, Jasper, but because I have some proof that Minon must have seen such a man."

"You have?" asked the detective.

"Why not? Don't I find out a good many things? Wasn't I about the first person to tell you that Miles Maccoon was dead—murdered? I know that the note which the cabman found in the bottom of his cab after driving that crazy woman through the streets told you that he was dead; but I wasn't far behind it with the information."

"That is right," assented Jasper.

The old man crossed his legs and smoothed down his pantaloons, a habit which had clung to him ever since the beginning of their acquaintance.

Was he about to tell what sort of a visitor he had had—how he had taken from a human back the mark which had been there through thick and thin? Was he going to betray Theron the Dastard "D," and would he tell Jasper, the detective, that one of the Trinidad brothers had felt that fear which comes to the heart of nearly every man hunted by a dagger?

Old Nickum did not speak for a full minute. He seemed to be collecting his thoughts and, knowing his peculiarities, Jasper watched him and let him have his way.

"When I was a young man," said the chemist, "I never thought I would turn informer in my old age. I became a rolling stone almost before I was out of my teens, and I left home for other lands. I drifted from place to place and there are few places in the world that I did not visit."

"Among others we were wrecked off the coast of Trinidad and I was thrown ashore on that island."

"You never told me this before, Nickum."

"Didn't have to," sententiously said the old man.

"All right."

"I found myself among all sorts of people, and I made some acquaintances which I should have shunned. That is the one chapter of my life which I never read aloud."

"You were poor dog Tray, eh?"

"I was a fool," snapped the old chemist.

"I fell in love and you know when a man does that he generally plays smash."

Such words from Nickum Nox amused the listening ferret. It was a confession he had never heard before, and he had to look at the chemist the second time before he could convince himself that he had heard aright.

"You smile at the very thought of me falling in love," continued the old man, "and you can't see how it can have any bearing on the trail you are on. The woman who stole my heart among the shades of Trinidad was not so pretty, but she was good. At least I thought so and that was enough for me."

"I married her in the English church there, and we lived happily till one day I made an exasperating discovery. I found that I had married a woman whose husband was somewhere abroad. She had told me that he was dead, but he turned up in a troublesome manner, and I—well, I found myself with a little girl in my arms, my child and hers."

"What could I do under the circumstances? I believed that she thought her husband was dead, for I could not think that Vira would deceive me. I was the most miserable wretch on the island. I thought that every one who saw me knew my secret, but few did. Even then I had taken up the study of chemistry. I knew something about the arts of the people there; I had analyzed the poisons of the tropics, and whenever I looked at little Chita in her cradle, my heart seemed to stand still at a contemplation of her future."

"Well, I endured the presence on the island of Vira's former husband till I could bear it no longer. He said nothing, but every now and then he would throw himself across my path like a shadow. I resolved to quit Trinidad. This resolution I carried into effect, taking passage one night in an American vessel bound for New York. I had not seen the city since my boyhood, and was not prepared for the changes that met me. I found a place for Chita and I, but the next day, while in a distant part of the city, I was taken sick, a fever followed and I was thrown into the hospital."

"There through six long weeks of delirium I tossed, to come out a mere shadow. I went to the place where I had left the little one; but she was gone. She had vanished completely, and the neighbors could tell me nothing about her. I was more than alone in the world. I thought of many crimes in connection with Chita's disappearance, and at one time I came near going back to Trinidad in hopes of finding that the mother had followed us to New York and abducted Chita."

"Time passed and I became what you see me now—a man well versed in chemistry, and called the Magic Chemist of Gotham. I have looked high and low for Chita. I have tried all the arts known to science in hopes of finding her. I have studied the strange and the dark. I have gone beyond the pale of my profession, for the heart of Nickum Nox is a father's heart. Until last night I had found no clue. I had hunted in vain. I saw last night the first gleam of light."

"Did it fall upon little Chita?" asked the detective.

"Let me show you."

Old Nickum Nox dived one hand into his pocket and brought up a ring which he threw on the table.

Jasper Joyce picked it up and leaned forward to examine it.

"That tells you but little," said the old chemist; "but it tells me more. That is a man's ring now, but the setting is what tells me something. It was in the ring which was on Chita's finger when I lost her. There can be no mistake, for I placed it there myself. It is the same stone."

"Where did you get this ring?"

"I stole it."

"You, Nickum?"

"I stole it," cried the old man, as his eyes flashed. "I took it from the hand of one of my patrons last night. He swore me to silence before he would give me a job; but that ring brings back the past and while I can't betray him, I will say, Jasper, that you are on the right trail. The man who wears the 'D' is the one you want. He

knows how Miles Maccoon died, and he and my patron last night must know what became of my child."

"And they are—"

"The Dastard D's of Trinidad," said the old man.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE STARTLING REVELATION.

"He's a queer one," remarked the detective as the figure of the old chemist vanished beyond his door. "He comes to me and half betrays one secret while he entirely reveals another. I never dreamed of this romance in his life. Wife and child? This is one of the things you have kept from me, Nickum Nox."

A short time afterward the detective might have been seen to enter the most noted house on Eighth avenue. It had acquired a good deal of notoriety within the last few days, and had been described in the newspapers till nearly every one in the city knew the location of its rooms and how many steps there were in the staircase leading up to the little chamber in which Minon discovered Gaspard Marks dead in his chair with a dagger buried to the hilt in his bosom.

Jasper Joyce was met at the door by Minon herself and was conducted to the library by that young lady.

Minon was glad to see him. She thought he might have news, as he had not put in an appearance for some little while, and she was very anxious to have the two mysteries cleared.

"If you have not much to tell me I may give you a bit of startling news," said the young girl. "You recollect the jewels which Gorell Grimm possessed and which I showed you the first visit you made here?"

"Distinctly," said the detective.

"I have made a singular discovery concerning them. They are not as many nor as valuable as we have believed, and they have been tampered with."

"Are some missing?"

"All the jewels are gone."

"Stolen?" cried Jasper with a start, "and you did not send for me?"

Minon smiled and crossed the room to a desk set against the wall. This she opened, and reaching in her hand she touched a button in the wall itself, opening by this means a niche in the wall. It was a secret door of which the ferret knew nothing.

She came back carrying in her hands a parcel wrapped in chamois/skin, and when she had unwrapped it a box of good dimensions and made out of some strange looking black wood stood revealed.

"Three months before the first of the tragedies," said Minon as she looked up at the detective, "a well known lapidary came to the house by summons. My benefactor wanted some of the jewels reset and on that occasion all were exhibited. I was present at the time and the jeweler pronounced them perfect stones of their kind, and declared that they were the best cut diamonds he had ever seen."

"Yesterday when I came to look at them again I noticed that they seemed to have been misplaced in the box and after awhile I sent for this same lapidary. He came at once, eager, as he told me, to see the gems again; but the moment he saw them his face changed color and he seemed to lose his breath."

"He made a brief examination and declared that not one real gem was in the box, but that all were paste diamonds, not worth their weight in dirt."

Jasper Joyce picked up one of the larger stones and held it between him and the light.

"It would deceive me," he said. "But you know, Miss Minon, I am no lapidary."

"They did not deceive the expert. He showed me the difference between the true and false stone, and convinced me in a little while that another crime had been committed. But who would have done it?"

"What about the secret of their hiding-place?"

"I have believed that it was shared by but two persons, Gorell Grimm and myself. When the lapidary came at a summons he was taken into another room while the gems were brought forth for inspection by my

benefactor when alone, and when he came yesterday, I did the same."

"You say nothing about Gaspard Marks," Minon started.

"I will not say that he was not possessed of the secret of the niche in the wall which had become our jewel-case; but I do not accuse him. These diamonds are paste, and I have been robbed, cleverly duped, and some one is the richer by the new crime."

"What is the worth of the gems?"

"The lapidary gave his opinion when he saw the real stones."

"Well?"

"He valued them at ninety thousand dollars."

Minon took some of the so-called diamonds in her hand and let them sift through her fingers.

"You have heard no one in the house since the last crime?" he asked.

"No one."

"Did you ever catch Gaspard in this room?"

"But once alone."

"And that was?"

"The day after Gorell Grimm's death."

"Did you come upon him suddenly?"

"Yes. I found him writing at the table yonder and he apologized for doing so the moment he saw me."

"And went out?"

"Yes; but he finished what he was writing, and I did not get to see it."

"What did the jeweler for whom you sent say about the duplication?" asked the detective.

"He said it was marvelous. He never saw such work. The gems were admirably counterfeited. They must have been away for days at a time while the duplication was being made; but how could that have been?"

"What have you thought about it, Miss Minon?"

"I don't know what to think. Sometimes I turn to Gaspard Marks and, then, unwilling to accuse the dead, I have turned to the hand that took his life. You see I am in a maze; I don't know what to think."

A smile came to play with the corners of the detective's mouth.

He went over and examined the desk; Minon showed him how the button worked and worked it for him before she put the box away.

"You are not so rich as you were?" he said, looking at her.

"No; but that does not bother me. Gorell Grimm was kind to me and I want to see his murderer punished. I believe that the man I saw in the hall—the one with the strange eyes that spelled me while I trembled on the stair—had a hand in all these crimes, and that is what I want you to prove for me."

"Minon, you have told me but little of the earliest relations between you and Gorell Grimm. You once said that you came to him in some mysterious manner when you were quite young; but beyond that you seem to know nothing."

"I remember telling you that which was perfectly true," was the reply. "But last night my hand came across several things which seem to have been hidden by him in the past. They consist of a half torn up diary and a map. I'll get them for you."

Minon ran out of the room and soon returned with the articles which she placed on the desk before the detective.

"You have looked at these things, girl?"

"Of course. I could not help it, you know."

"The map was drawn by hand and seems to have been made for an especial purpose."

"The pages of the diary have been cut. You will see that it looks as if the book at one time was pierced through by a dagger, for the leaves are all cut."

This was true, as the detective saw by handling the diary and when he had looked at it he turned again to Minon.

"Where were these found?"

"In the little room on the third floor, far back on a shelf where no one but a foolish girl would have thought of looking for them."

"The names on the map are Spanish," continued Minon. "You see that the country represented is an island. I can find but one like it in any of the atlases in the house."

"And that is—"

"The Island of Trinidad in the Caribbean Sea," said Minon.

The old detective seemed to smile.

"Did Gorell Grimm speak Spanish?"

"Spanish and three other languages."

"And wrote them, too?"

"I know that he wrote Spanish for he sometimes got letters in that language and answered them in the same."

"This is an old map," continued Jasper Joyce. "You never saw it before, Minon?"

"Never to my knowledge. My hands seemed to alight upon it on the dark shelf in the old closet. The diary is disconnected, partly because a good many leaves have been cut out."

Jasper had already discovered this.

He held the map between him and the strong light of day, and thought he detected lines which he had not seen before.

Instantly he thought of the experiment made by Nickum Nox with the three papers Minon had already given him, and how the figure of the branded man had been brought out by chemicals.

"Bring me a plate—a good large one from the sideboard," he said.

Minon hastened to do so, and when she returned she saw the detective as the table with a glass of water at his elbow.

He folded the old map once and laid it in the plate, after which he slowly poured over it the contents of the glass.

What sort of man was he, and what kind of experiment was he about to make, thought the puzzled girl.

"You needn't care about spoiling the old map," she said, to encourage him. "If you can make anything out of it by blotting it out of existence, do so."

For some minutes both Minon and the detective watched the map immersed in the fluid, and their heads were close together.

At last the detective opened the fold and looked at the back of the map.

"Look!" cried the girl with a start. "You have fetched out something. See the dark lines, and now letters appear! What a lot of writing I see on the back of the old chart."

It was true. Lines ran across the map in dark letters which had been brought out by Nickum Nox's wonder chemicals, and the two looked at them in silence.

"Heavens!" suddenly cried Minon. "What does it say? Do you believe the testimony of the old map? Cannot it be that I—I—"

She stopped and stood like a statue in the middle of the room, while Jasper Joyce looked up amazed.

He had read as follows:

"To the discoverer of this man's secret:—"

"Know that I am not Gorell Grimm, but Miles Maccoon, once the Man from the Shades. Know that I write this here, hoping that after I am dead the truth will be known, for I will not tell it while I live. As Miles Maccoon I left Trinidad hunted by the League I have betrayed, and loved by but one person in all this world—my sister."

"I know that the sworn Tigers are now on my trail—that they lurk oath-bound with the secret death at their command; but years may elapse before the blow is struck."

"I want the world to know that, as Miles Maccoon, I am a criminal of the deepest dye; that I have added the theft of a living being to my other crimes. Minon—the beautiful young creature who comes to me at night for a kiss—was stolen by me—stolen from her father who fled with her from a vicious mother's house. She knows it not and will never know unless she learns the secret of bringing out this confession, or throws this map into the hands of some one versed in the secrets of the laboratory."

"Minon is the child of a man whom I have seen in this city. He knows it not. She is his offspring, and he would give all he is worth to take her to his arms once more. But while I live he never will. I would make the girl my avenger, for she has in her veins her mother's tiger blood and her father's persistence. Minon, be my avenger after the blow has been struck, for the Dastard D's of Trinidad—the Three, Jorrock, Pasca and Theron—will have no mercy on the man who betrayed them all."

Jasper Joyce at the end of the writing

looked up at the fair girl whose face was white.

"My God! who am I?" cried Minon. "Why didn't he reveal all? Stolen in my youth and by the man I have loved. I was kept in the dark so as to become his avenger some day! Now let the law avenge him if it will; I will not."

Jasper Joyce said nothing; he knew whose child she was now.

Nickum Nox should have seen her at that hour.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CLAWS AND VELVET.

JORROCK of Trinidad stood alone in the lamplight that fell softly over pavement and street, and his gaze was riveted upon a figure that stood in the shadow of a certain house, as if afraid to quit it.

The bearded man was quite alone and the person who claimed his attention was in like condition.

He noticed no one of the many people who brushed him, cared for nothing but the lithe figure under the trees. It was like a tiger-cat watching a fawn lost in the forest, or a serpent charming the bird almost in its maw.

When the figure moved and came toward him Jorroock moved, too.

He did not lose sight of a single step made by the watched one and as it flitted past him, he smiled and followed.

He could have borne down upon the track-ed one at any time, but he did not.

Jorroock was in no hurry; he seemed to think that he had plenty of time for the play and that success would certainly come to him, for he merely kept the person in sight and—smiled.

The woman followed so assiduously by the Trinidad demon did not seem to realize that she was watched, yet she was cautious.

Every now and then she looked back, but reaching at last a house some distance from the place where Jorroock had studied her at his leisure, she entered a hallway and vanished.

What was left for this man, but to follow on?

He waited long enough to let the victim get composed within the building, then he crept up and tried the door which she had shut.

It was locked, but he came prepared.

He opened it and entered, too.

In the hall which was not lighted Jorroock halted as if to get his bearings. He tried to pierce the gloom that prevailed, but keen as his eyes were, they were not equal to this work, and he had to rely on his hands.

Jorroock was to some extent guided by a light.

It shone through a key-hole at the end of the hall, and he went toward it, finding a door there.

Instead of trying to open this door, he simply leaned against the jamb and listened.

He stood for thirty minutes in this attitude, when he became aware that the light no longer came from the room; all was dark beyond the door.

Jorroock was turning the knob with the intention of seeing if it would turn in his dark-hued hand when the front door opened with a slight noise.

He saw between him and the light of the street a boyish figure which came in.

"The boy," he said under his breath. "This is bad work. I did not care to see the young gutter-snipe."

The boy shut the door and ran down the hall. A collision was one of the certainties, as Jorroock knew, and he threw out his hand and caught the little fellow.

"Jehosaphat!" ejaculated the boy, but the voice was stifled, for Jorroock's grip was enough, and then all was still.

Tighter and tighter seemed to grow the grip of the dark hand, and when it relaxed something slid from Jorroock's grip and lay on the boards.

"He might have stayed away," said the Man from Trinidad. "He did it all himself."

Then he turned to the door again and found that it was not locked, as if the woman whom he had tracked to the place thought that to lock the outer door was quite sufficient.

He walked into a room where a light was turned very low, but it was untenanted.

Jorroock knit his brows with disappointment. Perhaps the boy had alarmed the woman.

She might have heard the half-suppressed scream and taken flight. He did not know.

Jorroock stood in the semi-lighted place like a man undecided what to do. He had been baffled. At one time he thought of going back and finishing the boy. Why had he not finished him at first?

"She must be somewhere in the nest!" he cried, bounding across the room and throwing himself against another door which he did not take the trouble to open carefully. "What has become of her?"

He ransacked the house. He went from room to room with the ferocity of a tiger, and at last came back to the first one without finding his prey.

Then he suddenly bethought himself of the boy. He went to the door and looked out into the hall. It was empty. The boy even had given him the slip, and after such a choking as he had received!

No wonder a curse parted the lips of Jorroock.

To have a woman escape him in that manner was decidedly provoking; and to be baffled by a boy was torture.

"I would have settled with her forever," said he. "We would have ended the old feud begun amid the sea and she should have worn the mark of the Dastard D's. I would have had news for Theron, but here I am beaten by a woman and a boy!"

Once more he went through the house, looking into places which had escaped his eyes before, and all the time cursing the luck which had let her slip through his soft hands.

Jorroock might have searched the house till dawn.

The scream of the captured boy had not frightened the woman off. She had not fled from the man standing like a statue of death at the door; but other events had taken her off.

She had entered that house for a purpose, and had carried it out, that was all.

She had remained in the room almost within reach of Jorroock's hands as long as she wanted to, and even while he listened for sounds, she had stolen forth unmolested.

Jorroock went out at last. He had failed to catch the victim almost in the net; he had lost the prey at the door of the trap, and could blame no one but himself.

Baffled and beaten and in no good humor, he went back home.

He threw himself down in the chair at the table and drew the cigars toward him in a savage manner.

There was blood in the eye of this cool man from the Caribbees.

He smoked awhile and then brought forth the jewels from their secret recess behind the curtain. He ran his hand through them as if they were worshiped by his sordid soul, and then he put them back.

He was still behind this curtain when he turned suddenly and ran toward the door.

The knob had been turned.

As Jorroock opened the door, a figure seemed to vanish down the steps, and something struck him in the face.

This frustrated him for a moment, and in that time he lost sight of the maker of the footsteps. The object which had fallen at his feet he picked up, and with it in his hands he turned back to the light.

"Only one line reached across the little sheet which he unfolded:

"You are the last one, Jorroock, of the D's."

The paper almost fell from his grasp and for a moment he stood looking at it while his breath seemed to stop and his heart stand still.

"The last one? It is false!" he cried. "She has not killed Theron. I will believe no such stuff. This tigress who seems to lead two lives has not overcome my brother of the brand. I will prove her a liar!"

He crushed the paper in his hand and buried it in his pocket as he went out.

He caught a cab almost at the very door of the house and was whirled away in it as he settled back upon the seat in the semi-darkness.

Fifteen minutes later the vehicle drew toward the gutter and Jorroock leaped out.

It was a different part of the city from that which he had left behind. He had been driven into the dark quarters and the wheels of the cab had rattled over stones more than once stained red.

Jorroock glanced up once at the building which confronted him and then vanished.

On the second floor of one of these he rapped at a door and feet crossed the room.

"I knew she lied!" cried Jorroock as he entered the room to stand face to face with Theron.

"But she was here," grinned the other.

"In this room?"

"Yes."

"Zira?"

"No, the Countess Violet. Zira would not come here; but Violet would."

Jorroock looked round the room and then at Theron.

"But she left word at my house that I was the last of the Brotherhood."

"Not at your house, Jorroock?"

"Yes. She was sure she had finished you, and she could not keep it."

"Why didn't you—"

"She vanished like vapor. I could not get a chance at her. I thought I had her once before to-night, but she vanished again."

"She did not intend to lie," said Theron, with a smile. "She believed that she had finished me."

"How could she believe that?"

Theron waved his hand toward the bed at one side of the room.

"The dummy was there."

Jorroock sprang forward and looked at the figure on the bed. He saw all at a glance.

"It was well played, Theron," said he.

"But where were you?"

"Not here, of course."

"She came like a shadow and struck?"

"Yes."

"To come to my house with the message which sent a thrill through all my being."

"Just like her. You knew her long ago, Jorroock."

The man from the Caribbees stood silent a moment and then turned toward the door.

"Let her think that she has succeeded," said he, "touching Theron's arm." Let her believe that she has sent you to the shades after Pasca, or Gaspard. We will find her the sooner for such belief. She will so exult that she will hunt me with courage that will betray her. She will play into our hands."

"That creature?" asked Theron with a tremor which Jorroock did not see.

"Yes. She will make a blunder; she has blundered to-night. I knew the nest. I have just come from it. She will go there once too often. Theron, of the 'D,' this woman is almost in our hands."

"And the detective?"

"He can be touched at any time. Just now he is making love to Minon. Come. We must prepare the trap for Violet."

They walked back from the bed and talked a long time under the light.

Theron more than once glanced toward the bed with a look of satisfaction.

He had outwitted the avenger; he had saved his life by an old stratagem, but, old or not, he had saved it.

After awhile they separated and Jorroock went down again.

Far and wide flashed the lights of New York.

As the bearded man went homeward in the cab which had waited for him on a near corner he lay back in the dark with his thoughts at work.

"I will," he suddenly exclaimed. "I might as well do that now and then it will be done."

He leaned forward and spoke to the man on the box:

"Grand and Broadway," said he.

"All right," was the response, and a moment later the horses turned a corner.

Jorroock settled back in the seat again. He paid no attention to the lights past which he was hurried; he did not seem to hear the thousand-and-one different noises that smote his ears. He was as calm as a summer's noon.

When the cab stopped he roused himself and opened the door.

As he stepped out he looked up and seemed to catch his bearings at a glance.

And having done this, he turned into Grand street with the air of a man who was the very essence of coolness.

CHAPTER XIX.

CHATTERS'S DILEMMA.

FOR the second time within a few hours Jorrock failed again. He reached a certain house which had a hallway and in he went.

He ascended the staircase that rose before him and stopped at a door. He stood there a few moments and listened with his ear at the key-hole; but Jorrock of the black beard heard nothing.

"Not at home, eh?" he whispered to himself. "Is it possible that I am not going to get to play my hand? Has he escaped me?"

At any rate the man from Trinidad heard nothing to excite him.

No sound came from the room where he listened, and when he had remained some moments at the door he turned and walked away.

Jorrock has failed again.

The long drive had been made for nothing and he had left Theron to find nothing.

Slowly the man turned back.

"Some other time," said he. "It will not be long for things are coming to a head. Yes, it will not be long and then—then we will stand free from the hunter and the snare!"

He did not take the cab back, but walked through the shadows below and vanished.

It was back to his house for Jorrock. He entered the room and threw his hat upon the table.

"They escaped me to-night, but they will not escape me very long," he concluded. "No one escapes Jorrock, but for a little while. When I go out to hunt again I will find."

With this assurance the man of coolness dropped asleep, and slumbered till the light of another day stole into the room and revealed him there.

If he had tarried a little longer in the corridor on Grand street, he would have encountered some one, and there might have been a scene.

If he had waited a few minutes longer, the detective would have come home.

The Night-Hawk Detective, fresh from the trail, came in and went to bed.

He had barely sought the pillow, when a rap sounded on his door.

Chatters stood on the threshold when the portal was opened and the detective smiled at the boy as he slipped into the room.

"You're an early bird, Chatters," said Jasper.

Without replying, the boy glided to the table and stopped there. He folded his arms upon his chest, as was his wont, and looked for a moment into the ferret's face.

"You've been in bed, Jasper," said he.

"Yes, one must sleep at times, no matter what is the pressure of business. What news have you for me, Chatters?"

"Not much, perhaps, but I thought I would tell you what I have accidentally discovered."

"Are you sure the discovery was accidental?"

"We'll call it so."

"Well, go on."

"You recollect the paper which you immersed in water to show me the picture of the man with the 'D' on his back?"

"I recall it, Chatters."

"Well, he has parted company with the letter."

Jasper started slightly.

"You don't mean that, boy," he exclaimed. "If that is an indelible mark, a real tattoo, how could he part with it?"

"I only know what I'm talking about," was the reply. "I know that the skin is clean now and that he has parted company with the 'D.'"

"Tell me how you know."

Chatters crossed his legs and took a long breath.

"I've had quite an adventure," said the boy. "In the first place, I was nearly choked to death by a hand which I would not have at my throat again for all New York. I entered a house and found the man on guard in a dark hallway; but he failed to kill me and I slipped away while he was elsewhere in the place."

"That was adventure number one," smiled Chatters, as he paused a moment. "When I left that house it was with a desire to get as far away from it as possible. Then came the second adventure."

"With the same man?" asked the detective.

"No, with another one. I ran across him on the street and something peculiar about him struck me at once. I shadowed him home, saw him enter a certain house, and, as there was a back shed to the premises, I made my way to it and watched. Presently that man was visited by another who looked strikingly like him, and they were together awhile. I could not catch all they said, but they seemed to be brothers and when they separated I remained on the roof and let the visitor go."

"The man left behind locked the door after

the first one and began to disrobe. He placed two mirrors so as to look at his own back, and when he saw it was bare of marks, he laughed to himself and courage seemed to return.

"I heard him say: 'Thanks to the old man, I am free from the mark and no longer wear the brand of the tropics. Were she to find me she would not get to feast her eyes upon the mark of the old days, nor get to thrust her dagger through the black-rimmed letter.' That told me that he had parted company with a brand. Don't you think it so, Jasper?"

"It looks that way, Chatters," said the detective. "You saw his back, did you?"

"Plainly. He stood between the mirrors and I was crouched at the window."

"It was clean, was it?"

"No sign of a mark of any kind. If ever one scared him it had been removed, and so neatly that no trace remained."

"But he gave you no clue as to who removed the mark?"

"Nothing but the words the 'old man.'"

Jasper Joyce thought a moment, during which Chatters looked at him with a curious smile.

"Do you know any one who can remove such things, Chatters?" he asked.

"I know an old man who is up in all things like that, but I can't say that he did it."

"Where does he live?"

"I guess you know him, Jasper."

"Name him, boy?"

"Nickum Nox."

The New York ferret laughed.

"Do you mean to tell me that you think he would remove a mark from that man's back and let me remain in the dark?"

"I don't know, but he is the Magic Chemist, and he can do almost anything in his line."

"But we work together on this trail. Nickum Nox is my friend and sometimes my adviser, but he has secrets; I know that."

"The man whom I watched said that 'the old man' had removed the brand, and that is all I know. I own that I thought of Nickum Nox before I dropped from the shed, but you see one is liable to be mistaken. Shall we drop this, Jasper?"

"Not yet, boy. Were the two men whom you watched very much alike?"

"Alike yet unlike," said the boy. "They were perfect physically; but they did not seem to have the same kind of eyes. One had very dark ones and the other's were gray, so far as I could see."

"Jorrock and Theron," thought the detective. "The boy has seen the last two men of the Trinidad Brotherhood. Where was the last man you watched, Chatters?"

The boy gave the detective a number of which he made a mental note, and then he suddenly looked at Chatters again.

"What were you doing in the house where you were choked?"

"I was looking after my mistress."

"The Countess Violet?"

"Yes."

"And you say you found a man at the door inside and he throttled you?"

"That's just what he did. When I came to he was gone, but I could hear him in the house. Of course I did not deem it best to remain there any longer, and I slipped from the place and vanished."

"Left Violet to her fate, eh?"

"I am sure he did not find her, for the countess is shrewd. She is equal to that man's best play. I felt that I was leaving him alone in the house."

"Violet has not been back to the 'palace' for some time, I believe," said Jasper.

"She told me that she was going away and I believe she has not entered it since."

"But what you have seen to-night leads you to believe that she is still in the city?"

"She is still here," answered the boy.

Jasper Joyce seemed to think a moment and Chatters uncrossed his legs.

"You have not been dismissed, boy?" he suddenly asked.

"No. She told me that she would not need me till she came back."

"What did you infer from that?"

"That she would not come back till she had settled a few things."

"With the common foe?"

"Yes."

"With Jorrock and Theron?"

"Of course. She called her manikin such names as suited her while she practiced with the dagger. Violet is on the war-path."

Jasper remained up after the footsteps of the boy had ceased to clatter on his stair.

Chatters was shrewd and courageous, but he was devoted to the woman whom he had served. He believed that Violet had a right to hunt down the men whom she had named during the dagger exercise and to have aided her in her vengeance he would have gone to great lengths.

At the same time he was the friend of the detective to whom he repeatedly confessed that he owed his life; but Chatters was beginning to see that while serving Jasper he was likely to get Violet into very deep waters.

"What am I to do?" he asked himself when he struck the street and started off. "Here I am

telling Jasper about Violet and she wants to carry out her revenge. Jasper is after the hand that killed Gorell Grinn, and at the same time he wants to know who put Gaspard Marks out of the way. Gaspard was killed with a dagger just like the one the Countess throws at her manikin and—Great Caesar! I wonder if Jasper thinks from what I have told him that she killed the man in the chair. It will never do, Chatters."

He stopped as he gave vent to the last sentence and looked around.

"I've got to go slow," he went on. "I can't tell him much more about the Countess or I will get her into trouble. I believe she had a right to deal with Jorrock, Pasca and Theron and maybe Jasper has, too. It's a complicated affair and I—I wish I had never had anything to do with either!"

The boy was in a dilemma, and for ten minutes he leaned against the tall building with the wind blowing on his face and cooling it.

"Why not go and tell Violet what the detective seems to believe?" he suddenly exclaimed. "That will put her on her guard. She will know what to do and when to keep away from him. But Jupiter! how can I tell her without getting my foot into it?"

Chatters saw that he was getting deeper and deeper into the unpleasant predicament and when he started off his face wore a triumphant expression.

"I'll try it, anyway," said he. "Something has to be done. One of the men has lost the brand and if he can lose such a thing as that he can change his very skin. What if the other one does the same? That would be beating both Jasper and Violet, and, as my name is Chatters, that shall not be done!"

He hurried on and on, nor paused till he had reached a house at the door of which he stopped.

"She may be asleep. This must be Violet's last hiding-place, and from this house she intends to go out and finish the game—if the detective doesn't come between."

The hour was late, and Chatters, after trying the door which did not yield to him, slipped to the rear of the house with better success.

He entered by raising a window and groped his way from room to room; and all at once a door opened in his face and in the light that nearly blinded him, he found himself face to face with the very person whom he sought—Violet, the Avenger!

"You?" cried the woman as she caught Chatters's arm and pulled him forward. "You come like a burglar."

"There wasn't any other way for me to come," grinned the boy.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DOUBLE LIFE.

THE face of the Countess was pale and excited.

As she held Chatters her hand seemed to sink into his arm, and she drew him into the room and shut the door.

"You have something to tell me?" said she. "What is it? Am I tracked?"

"You have been tracked. I have seen the man at the door of the room where you seemed to be."

"When?"

"Earlier in the night."

"But not in this house?"

"No, in the other one."

"Why didn't you warn me then?"

"He caught me—sunk his fingers into my throat till they seemed to meet behind my windpipe, and you know one cannot do much when caught in that shape."

"That is true, my boy. I do not blame you; but when you came to, why didn't you come and warn me then?"

"I guess you had given him the slip. At least he did not find you."

For a moment Violet looked at Chatters and then she smiled.

"So I had him that near me and did not know it? What was he like, boy?"

"I could not see much of him at the time, for the hall was dark; but from what I have seen since he was a large man with black eyes and a beard of the same color."

"It was Jorrock!" muttered Violet under her breath, but Chatters, watching the lips, seemed to catch the name.

"Mistress," continued the boy, "I have come to tell you something else."

"Go on, then."

"I have seen a man who has lost the brand that was on his back."

She seemed to lean forward and the next moment she was looking at Chatters with staring eyes.

"You mean that you saw a dead man who would never care whether he wore a brand or not."

"No, the man I saw was alive. I saw him in his own chamber and between two mirrors which showed me his back while he could see it himself."

Violet did not breathe now. Silenced by the intense excitement which controlled her,

she only watched the boy and waited for him to go on.

"I saw both of them in one room—"

"When was that? Make no mistake in the time, boy."

"I will not. I will tell you all I know, mistress. It was about two hours ago."

"What time was it?"

"The clock somewhere struck twelve while I watched them."

"It can't be," cried Violet. "It can't be that they were together at that time."

"I heard the clock. I heard it in all its strokes for it could not have been very far from where I was."

Violet's face changed color and her hands shut.

"But go on. Tell me about the man who looked at his own back and saw no marks there," she said.

"I saw him look and heard what he said."

"Well?"

"He said, thanks to the old man, he was rid of the brand and that 'she' had failed to play out her deadly hand."

Violet seemed to reel in her chair.

"My God! did she fail?" she cried. "Is it possible that she failed to carry out her purpose?"

Chatters made no reply.

"The 'old man' relieved him of the mark, did he?" she went on. "He gave him all the credit, did he?"

"He did, but he mentioned no names."

"He did not have to. He was not obliged to speak the old man's name to name him to me."

"You know him, then?"

"Yes, yes."

"I saw him get into bed and then I slipped from my perch."

"You left him to his slumbers, did you?"

"I had no further business there."

"Then, did you follow the other man who had been with him?"

"No."

Chatters saw Violet rise and watched her as she paced the floor, taking hasty steps across the carpet.

"I thank you, boy," she suddenly said, coming up to him and bending over his chair.

"You are worth your weight in gold. I will repay you one of these days when there will no longer be a Countess Violet for you to serve. But what is your master doing?"

Chatters nearly fell from his chair.

"My master?" he cried, looking up in the woman's face.

"Why not your master?" said Violet with a smile. "You ought to serve him. He saved you life once. I mean the detective."

Chatters had been found out. He had never known before that Violet knew that he was Jasper Joyce's friend and spy.

It was the one secret which he had tried to guard from her.

"Don't flush and look down," continued Violet. "I know something about this master of yours, boy. Is he still on the trail?"

"Yes," answered Chatters, almost before he knew it and then he flushed up again.

"There, that will do. So he is on the trail, picking up link by link the chain of guilt. He tells you none of his secrets, of course?"

"Why should he?"

"That is true—why should he tell you, boy? He is shrewd. He is cool, but this is the puzzle of his career and he is anxious to get to the bottom of it."

"He says he will get there."

"Indeed?" and Violet smiled again. "Which trail is he on at present?"

"You think there are two, then?"

"They say there are two—the one which started after the death of Gorell Grimm, and the one which began when Gaspard Marks died."

Chatters thought he detected a change in the woman's tones when she mentioned the name of Minon's servant.

To her he might have been other than Gaspard.

"Jasper Joyce is a detective and one of the best," said the boy. "He will find all the links in the chain, though it may take him a long time to get them all."

"You have confidence in this man."

"Why shouldn't I have? I have witnessed his triumphs and have seen him reach conclusions when the other ferrets gave up long before. There is no better detective than this very Jasper Joyce."

"That is right. Think well of the man who saved your life. But if you serve him how are you going to serve me?"

Chatters smiled.

He had thought of this very idea. It had puzzled him not a little and he had wondered if he would not have to choose between the two; continue to serve the one and abandon the other.

"I like Jasper Joyce," he said. "As you seem to know, I am indebted to him, for one day he pulled me out from beneath the wheels of a butcher's cart. I owe him so much that I can't help serving him, but I don't want you to think—"

"That in serving him you will betray me. Is that it?"

Chatters started. He recalled what he had told Jasper Joyce about the dagger and the manikin; he thought of all that he had told him about Violet, known to the ferret as "Zira, the Strange," and now that he was looking into her face, what must he say?

"I will have to quit your service," he cried, springing up. "I will have to leave it, I say, for I may go too far and tell Jasper Joyce that which you would not have him know for the world."

"What's that? You have told him something already."

The boy did not speak.

"Come! Look me in the eye," and Violet fixed her gaze upon Chatters. "You have been playing double."

"I did not think at the time that you had a hand in the double mystery."

"What sort of hand?"

"You know."

Violet seemed to fall back to the table under the light and from there she looked at the boy till her face drew dark.

"You have been playing spy," she suddenly cried, and the next moment with the spring of a pantheress she came forward and Chatters found himself in her grip.

"He has kept you at my heels! You have been serving this detective while you have pretended to serve me. You have been his spy and my traitor!"

Deeper and deeper sunk the long fingers into Chatters's arm. He looked into the eyes that blazed before him and all at once saw the fierce light fade.

Violet's grasp loosened as suddenly as it had been taken and she staggered back and sunk nerveless upon the edge of her bed.

"They will find me at last. I know it," she cried. "I am in the net and I will feel the bite of the death spiders of Trinidad. What can I do to get out of the shadow? Nothing. I am hemmed in. The dreadful doom comes on with the certainty of death itself, and I can't fight off the fate that besets me. Go! leave me alone, boy. I am in the net and I already feel the sting of the reptile."

Chatters looked at her amazed. Was this the creature who a moment ago was cool and defiant? Was this the woman he had seen hurling her daggers at the branded manikins in her tiger-adorned room?

It could not be the Countess Violet. Surely he had come to the wrong house.

But all at once there rushed through his mind what Jasper had told him about Zira and how he believed that the two were one and the same person; how at times Zira was the Countess Violet and vice versa.

The woman living this strange double life was before him. She had become Zira again—Zira, the creature full of fears, and at the very moment when she should have remained Violet, the fearless—the cool avenger.

"They will not find you," said the boy, rising and going over to her. "They will not come to this house, for my master will stand between you and them."

"Your master, Jasper Joyce—the man called the Gotham Javet?"

"Jasper, the Night Hawk Detective—is the man."

"Where is he?"

"I left him at home awhile ago."

"Would he come here and stand between me and them?"

"I don't know."

"You say he is picking up link by link the two chains."

"He is. He knows the man who has lost the 'D,' and he knows, too, that one of the two is Jorrocks and the other Theron."

"And what does he say?"

Violet checked herself and turned her head away for a moment.

Chatters waited for her to go on but she remained silent while he watched her.

"Will you go to him and tell him that I want to see him?" she suddenly asked.

"I will gladly carry the message to Jasper," was the reply.

"Then go! Tell him that I want to see him now. Say to him that I can give him a great link for the chain—that I will put him nearer the prey than he has ever been."

"I will tell him that my friend, the Countess Violet—"

"No, not that title! Call me 'Zira' when you go to him. Not a word about the Countess, boy. On your life, don't call me that to the Javet!"

"All right, then. You shall be Zira, as you desire. The Night Hawk shall not know that the Countess sent me, but that I come from Zira."

"That is it. Now go! The shadow draws closer and I can't escape except by a hand and a brain like Jasper Joyce's. Go, and don't let a blade of grass lift beneath your feet."

Chatters turned away and rushed from the room and Violet waited till the outer door had closed, when she sprang up with a cry.

"What a fool I am! This ferret shall not find me when he comes."

She was the Countess once more.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ROLL OF A COIN.

CHATTERS delivered his message but when Jasper Joyce reached the house Zira had vanished and the detective had the trip for his pains.

He seemed to know what had happened.

"From what Chatters said she was Zira when she sent the message; but when she got cooler she became the Countess Violet, and I am in the lurch."

He walked away with a smile and afterward turned up in his room where the boy spy waited for him.

"What did she give you for your trouble?" asked Chatters.

"I found no one in the house. Your mistress simply took second thought and became Violet once more."

"I was half afraid she would do it," was the reply. "That's one reason why I got away from her as soon as I could. I saw that she was not the Countess while she talked about being in the shadow, and I feared she would change her mind before I could get away. You did not get to track her?"

"She has vanished completely."

"A strange creature."

"One of the strangest I ever saw," said the detective. "Chatters, you may have lost your mistress for some time."

The boy looked at Jasper, but did not speak.

"She was surprised when you told her that you had seen a man who had apparently parted company with a brand?"

"She was startled," was the reply. "Violet had not looked for information of this kind. Well, if I have lost my mistress, I will not get to see more of the dagger practice on the manikins."

Chatters smiled and got up.

"I'll see you later, Jasper," said he. "I am going out."

"To look for Violet?"

"I may find her."

"If you do, what?"

"I will tell you."

"At once, if you please, Chatters."

"At once!" echoed the boy, as he passed through the door, closing it behind him and leaving the detective alone in the den.

But Chatters was not to find the Countess; he was to roam the streets through the first light of another day, but his footsteps were not to take him to the beautiful but vengeful woman whose double life had puzzled more than one person in Gotham.

Chatters was at breakfast in a modest place when the doorway was suddenly darkened and he looked up to start, for the man who came down the floor had his eyes fastened on the very table at which he sat.

In a moment Chatters knew the man.

He had seen him the night before, standing between two mirrors looking at his tanned back that appeared almost yellow in the gaslight.

It was Theron!

He came on and took the table nearest the boy spy.

The light that prevailed showed Chatters the almost white face of Theron, and he covertly watched him as he took a newspaper from his pocket and opened it.

The hand shook a little; the eyes wandered uneasily over the page, and as he leaned back in the chair while he waited for the black coffee, Chatters could not help looking at him and comparing him with the other, Jorrocks.

Theron sipped the coffee and folded the paper.

As he pulled out some silver to pay for the little smack, something rolled to the floor with a jingle.

Theron paid no attention to the loss at first, but he soon moved his chair to look for the coin.

As he could not find it, Chatters volunteered to help him, but their combined efforts were unsuccessful, and at last with a laugh, Theron gave it up.

Chatters watched him as he moved out, his handsome figure vanishing slowly like the picture of a panorama, and as he moved his own chair to get away from the table, something rung on the floor.

The boy looked down and spied what they had hunted for.

In an instant he had picked it up and was holding in his hand a singular-looking coin, which had a square hole in the center.

"Chinese," said Chatters, holding up the coin with a grin. "I hope he didn't hate to lose this on account of its value in trade. It's nothing but a 'cash,' punched like a counterfeit coin, and—What is this stenciled on this side?"

He leaned forward where the light was stronger and saw the letter "D" on one side of the coin near the top.

"Something for Jasper," said the boy. "Always the 'D' of the Trinidad League," and he pocketed the coin as he left the table.

Half-way down the room he encountered the loser of the money.

Theron had come back so suddenly that the boy started when he saw him, and the next moment they met.

"Find it?" asked Theron, with a flushed face. What should he say?

"We'll go back and take another look," said Chatters, and he returned to the tables with Theron, and both looked again for the missing coin.

"Was it very valuable?" asked Chatters.

"It was a keepsake, valued for old associations," was the answer; but the boy's hand did not wander to the coin in his pocket, and he let Theron have his hunt out.

"Let it go," suddenly exclaimed the man. "I can't afford to look all day for a penny."

"So you can't, but you can't guess where it is," thought Chatter as he walked out behind Jorroek's friend.

Theron went to the nearest corner and turned. He crossed the street a moment later and kept on till Chatters saw him enter a hallway well known to him.

Nickum Nox had his room in that building, and Theron was going back to the Magic Chemist.

Old Nickum met him at the door and held it open for him. Theron had not been back since the removal of the "D" and the moment he had crossed the threshold he turned upon the chemist and said:

"I am satisfied. It is gone."

Nickum Nox, looking over his spectacles, said nothing but a curious gleam seemed to come to his eyes.

"You know how to do some things," continued Theron. "You could almost change a man's color."

"Oh, I can do that," was the answer. But that would take time."

"How much?"

"I cannot say with certainty."

Theron folded his arms and straightened before the old man.

"A week?" said he.

"Longer than that."

"A month?"

"Perhaps."

"Then, you are not the man I want to see."

"You don't want to lose your color, as you've lost the letter, do you?"

"You don't know what I want."

"That is true," said the old chemist.

"You say it would take a month to make another man of me—to give me a new skin?"

"I would promise to do it in that time if I did it at all."

"I can't wait."

Nickum Nox watched the man as he stood before him and suddenly laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Will you let me see?" he asked.

Theron smiled.

"Certainly," and he began to throw off his coat.

The old chemist assisted him and when the shoulders were bare he bent forward with the eagerness of a man almost fearful of being disappointed.

"It's a pretty good job, don't you think?" said Theron.

Old Nox looked a moment longer and said with a smile:

"If it suits you, all right."

"It suits me."

The clothes were replaced and Theron picked up his hat; but at the door he stopped and looked back.

"It's a secret, you know," he said.

"Of course."

"Forever, Nickum Nox."

"Forever!"

Bang went the door and the chemist saw the tall man vanish.

"That man has become a coward. He is afraid of what he once sought with a hand of vengeance. His life has changed, and he would start at a certain shadow if it should cross his path. Wanted his very skin to change color, he did. Not satisfied with the removal of the 'D,' he would change his very personality. The hunter has awakened to the discovery that he is mercilessly hunted; he is afraid of the huntress, at that. What does the other one think? He will not have the letter removed. Jorroek, Jasper calls him. Theron has turned coward; Jorroek is still Tiger."

Followed by such words, Theron walked from Nickum Nox's place and looked back over his shoulder as he left the hallway below.

The old man had sized him up, without a mistake. He was a coward. Violet, or Zira, which you will, reader, had frightened the strong man by the death of Pasca or Gaspard and the attack on the dummy in his room.

Cowards usually are easy prey for the detective, but Jasper Joyce was to discover that Theron was still able to resist and that in a manner as terrible as it was ingenious.

Theron vanished from that part of the city and for some time he did not turn up.

It was ten o'clock when the door-bell of the Grimm house on Eighth avenue sent its tones through the rooms beyond and startled Minon.

"It is Jasper Joyce again," said the girl, as she answered the summons, but the moment

she opened the door she fell back with her hand on the knob, for she stood face to face with Theron.

The man walked in while she gripped the knob and turned upon her in the hall.

"You pardon, miss," said he. "I have come to see you on a matter of business, connected somewhat with the two events which have given this house considerable notoriety."

Minon looked at the man without answering.

"Shall we go to the library?" he went on.

She led him to the room and he dropped into a chair near the desk.

She could not help noticing how handsome he was, dark of skin and like an East Indian, and his long-fingered hands suggested something which seemed to come to her like a flash.

"You are Miss Minon?" said Theron, as he looked into the deep eyes of the girl.

"I am Minon Grimm."

"His child?"

"I took his name."

"I see. You are an adopted—Minon the Adopted. All that he left is yours."

"I am considered his sole legatee."

"Do you know where he got you?"

Minon recalled the revelation of the old map—that which the detective had brought out through the agency of the chemicals borrowed from Nickum Nox.

She did not reply to the man's last question.

"You don't care to discuss this question?" said Theron. "You are loth to reveal your identity. I don't blame you."

He showed his teeth in a grin; then he rose and walked toward the door.

"If you know it you may disclose it," cried Minon.

"If you know who I am you—"

"I know, miss. I know all about your babyhood and about the past. I was there," and with this he opened the door and passed out.

In the hall Minon caught his arm and stopped him.

"I've seen you before!" she cried. "I saw you in this house the night my benefactor died. I was on the steps yonder and you were there!" and she covered a spot on the floor with quivering finger.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BRANDED BACKS.

"In this house when he died?" suddenly laughed Theron. "I guess you have picked up the wrong clue for once."

"But I saw your face. I was riveted on the steps yonder by eyes just like yours and—"

Theron had turned so that she could look straight into his face and she had broken her own sentence.

"I see, I see! Those eyes were very black and yours—yours are gray."

"I thought so."

"But the face and figure. He had a black beard like yours. He had a dark skin like yours, and I watched him till he came out of that room where the dead was."

Theron smiled as he listened.

"You have told the hunter all this, have you?"

"Why shouldn't I have told him?"

"Sure enough. Why not?"

"I wanted to see him avenged. I wanted to put the detective on the trail, but now—"

"Well, what now?"

"I don't care whether he reaches the end of that trail or not."

"You don't, eh?"

"I do not."

"Why not, girl?"

"I have had my eyes opened. I know what he was. I have looked at Gorell Grimm's past; I know what he did. And that is why I don't care very much if Jasper Joyce runs down the guilty or not."

"Oh, you have had a revelation?"

"Yes."

"Did the detective discover it for you?"

"Never mind that. Who are you?"

"Men call me Mark Amber; that name is as good as any."

"But you must have another name," said Minon, quickly. "There were three of you."

"So your detective says, eh?"

"What he says he knows. There is no better ferret than Jasper Joyce."

"And he says there were three of us? That is something."

"There were Jorroek, Pasca and Theron."

"Which of the three have I the honor to be, miss?"

He seemed to increase an inch in stature as the question fell from his lips.

"I know you are not Pasca."

"Then, of one thing you are certain. And pray how do you know I am not Pasca?"

"Pasca is dead."

"Then, by Jove, I don't care about being Pasca."

"Yes," continued Minon, "Pasca is dead. He died in this house up stairs."

"According to this detective, then, Jorroek and Theron are the living ones."

"They are living."

"And I am one of the two! You are simpering this thing down to a demonstration."

"I believe that I am telling the truth. You know."

"If I am Jorroek, I know, and if I am Theron I can't be ignorant of the facts."

Minon thought the man's cleverness exasperating.

"Good-morning, miss. You are clever, but you will have secrets, I see," said he. "I may come again."

"You will never come again," was the reply.

"Don't be so positive. You don't know me."

Half a minute later Minon, alone in the hall, was recalling every word uttered by her strange caller. He had gone down the steps with a light step, and his coolness had not deserted him at any time.

"A girl worth winning, but I can't attempt it—not now, at any rate," said Theron, to himself, as he walked away. "But it did me good to get a peep at her at home and to hear her say what she did. She has discovered something that has revealed Miles Maccoon's past to her and now she doesn't care whether Jasper Joyce, the ferret, gets to the bottom of the mystery or not. What was that discovery and when did she make it? I thought Pasca found all the hidden papers in the house before the blow fell, but he may have overlooked some. Miles Maccoon was great for writing in strange ink. He had maps of the island and the odd places about it, for his thoughts seemed to dwell on that part of his life."

"She is pretty," he went on. "The newspapers said so at the start, and they did not lie. She had cool blood in her veins on her father's side, and she showed some of her mother's spirit while she talked to me. Minon, my little one, if I were not Theron just now, you would have a lover who would win you in spite of God and man. But I can't turn aside for love-making—not just now."

Theron returned to his own lodgings to find that a bit of folded paper had been poked into the room under the door and he opened it as soon as found.

"Come to me at once," he read. "At whatever hour you find this, don't stop, but come. JORROCK."

Theron seemed to hesitate as he looked, but he folded the paper and hid it in his clothes.

"I am coming, Jorroek," said he half aloud, as he made a few changes preparatory to going out again.

What could Jorroek want that was so urgent?

It did not take Theron long to reach the vicinity of Jorroek's abode, and as he opened the door and stalked in a man at the table looked out from a wreath of smoke and greeted him.

"I have sent for you to renew the oath. Not the one we took after coming to New York, but the first and the old one."

There was no reply. Theron looked across the table at the speaker and tried to catch the real meaning of his words.

"You remember that we took that oath under the trees on the beach," continued Jorroek. "It was the first vow of vengeance and retaliation. It was to run so many years, and, if not fulfilled in every particular, was to be renewed."

"I recall it now."

"Well, it has run out and as our work is not finished, it has to be renewed."

"Will not the second oath serve the same purpose?"

"No, the old one must be taken. That is why I have sent for you, Brother Theron."

The face of Theron seemed to pale before the searching eyes of Jorroek.

"We will touch the 'D's' now as we did then. We will lay our fingers on the marks we wear and renew the old oath."

Why did Theron start?

He had lost his 'D.' He had gone to Nickum and the Magic Chemist had removed it.

He dared not remove his garments and let Jorroek look where the letter had been; that would tell the story of the coward and the faint at heart.

He fell back from the table and felt cold drops of sweat stand out on his forehead.

"Come," cried Jorroek, impatiently, as he flung his coat upon a chair. "We are alone and the last of the Brotherhood. We have lost Pasca and the others—the first in Trinidad and Pasca at his post in this American city. Off with your coat, Theron."

The man who listened grated his teeth.

He looked at Jorroek with the ferocity of a tiger, but he did not stir.

"By Jove! you are not losing courage, are you?" cried Jorroek, as he rose. "I never thought to see Theron falter with the game almost played through and the long-struggled-for prize almost in our hands. What is the taking of an old oath to what we will reap here in a short time? Come, I say, Theron; the oath and then the victory!"

"I dare not strip," said Theron at last. "I have not had the courage to look at my mark ever since I had a terrible dream in which I thought a dozen imps from Tartarus were stealing the letter from me. It is foolish, I know, but you know, Jorroek, what strange dreams come to

us at times, and I appeared to feel the removal of the letter by the little demons."

"Ho, if that is all," cried Jorrock, "you need not care to expose the spot."

He laid his hand on Theron's arm.

"He is superstitious," thought the man touched. "I have prepared him for the loss of the mark. Jorrock will see that I am minus the letter and he will recur to the dream."

Slowly Theron divested himself of his garments which he let fall over his waist and at last he stood before Jorrock, his olive skin shining in the gaslight and looking as soft as silk.

"Now for the oath. I will repeat it," said Jorrock and then we will touch the letters to seal the vow.

A moment's silence followed and then the voice of Jorrock was heard repeating the oath taken years before under the trees of the Caribbean Isle. Theron listened without moving a nerve, but his teeth were set and his eyes watched Jorrock like a tiger.

"Turn," said Jorrock and Theron whirled, leaving his companion to look at his bared shoulders.

What would Jorrock say?

What would be his exclamation when he should discover that the brand was not there?

"By Jove! it's as black as ever," cried the head of the Caribbean trio.

Theron started like one shot.

Impossible! Why should Jorrock tell him that the brand was still there when he knew that Nickum Nox had taken it off?

What motive for such a falsehood would he have?

Theron's wonder increased when Jorrock continued with the ceremony, touching the spot where the "D" had been, and when he finished, the bewildered man ran over to where the mirror hung.

There he twisted his body till he could see for himself.

Jorrock had not lied.

The "D" was there!

It had come back, blacker than before and in the same spot!

For a moment the man stood thunderstruck at the glass. He did not know what to say or think.

Jorrock was looking at him in an amazed manner; he was thinking, too.

"What did you think?" suddenly asked Jorrock. "Did you suppose time had obliterated the letter? Not while we live to hunt will it leave our bodies. After that—yes, when we have settled with the tigress, we may go to some one skilled in taking such things off, and part company with the brand. But not till then."

Theron, with his wonder unabated, came back and donned his clothes again.

"A thousand curses on the head of that old wretch!" he grated under his breath. "But after all he served me a good purpose for what might have happened if the brand had not been there, heaven only knows. But what brought it back? It was not there when I looked last night. The skin was clear of any mark. I looked with all eyes and it was not there, and he, Nickum Nox, looking himself confirmed the evidence of my own sight."

But the mystery was too deep for Theron, and he dismissed it for the present.

"Now," said Jorrock, calling him back to the game on hand, "we must strike the last blow. The time has come. The detective is picking up link after link. He is apt to step between us and our quarry, for I have watched the methods of this man. He is cunning and fertile in imagination. He has found the missing papers—the ones which Miles Maccoon left behind. He has them in his care, and his friend, the old chemist, may bring out their secret meaning. You know where the real clue lies. The papers will tell why it was done. Jasper Joyce will see through it all, and then he knows something about the double life."

Theron listened, but in silence.

"It will be the last stroke. We can find her. She cannot escape us. Indeed, while she is Violet, she does not want to escape, and from this time on she will be Violet and not Zira, the quivering. She has at last merged both natures into one, and we must now finish the tigress of Trinidad!"

Theron leaned across the table and two hands met.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Theron and the Detective.

JASPER JOYCE knew that things were drawing to a head.

He knew that the woman called Zira by disappearing even after she had sent Chatters to him with a message, had changed her mind and that she was again the avenger on the trail.

She had once more become the Countess Violet, had dropped the role of Zira, and that in her present role she would hunt down Jorrock and Theron before he could accomplish his purpose.

Chatters had promised to tell him where Zira was if he saw her again, but the chances were that she would keep aloof from her boy page,

and remain under cover till the dagger had again done its work.

He was surprised by a visit from the boy, who pulled from his pocket the coin which Theron lost in the eating-house and threw it on the table.

Jasper Joyce picked it up and saw on one side the letter "D" and as he looked he smiled.

"I have one like it. See," said he displaying a similar coin at which Chatters looked a moment and then lifted his eyes to the ferret's face.

"Where did you get it?" asked Chatters.

"Minon found it in the hall after the murder."

"After the first one?"

"Yes."

The coins were exactly alike and the boy laid them side by side while he examined them.

"They may have been mates," he said at last.

"Yes, they may have reposed in the same pocket. You see they appear to have been worn alike."

"I see that," said Chatters. "My man wanted to find this one very bad, but all the time it was in my pocket and I thought of you while he hunted on the floor."

"And while you pretended to help him, boy?"

"Of course. I looked everywhere under the table and the chairs, and at any time I could have put my hand on the piece."

It was the next morning after the night that witnessed the renewal of the oath between the two men of the Trinidad League.

Jasper Joyce dismissed the boy spy with the injunction to be on the lookout for Zira, and to track her if he saw her, while he himself walked from his den and turned up in another part of the city.

It was to be an eventful day and the Gotham Javert seemed to realize it.

"I must find Violet," said he. "This strange woman is liable to break up all my plans and prevent the chain from becoming complete. She is desperate and has gone back to the part of the mad Countess, and Zira will be heard of no longer in the game."

He turned up in the neighborhood of the house at one time occupied by Zira as the Countess—the house with the tiger-skin rugs.

As he passed it, glancing up at the closed shutters, he thought he detected the moving of one of the slats, and this sent a thrill through the frame of the city tracker.

Some one was in the house!

Had Zira come back, and had she made that place again her nest as she perfected her plans for the destruction of the two men from Trinidad?

For Jasper to see the face at the window—he was almost sure he had caught a glimpse of one there—was to act.

If Zira had recognized him, the game would soon be up and the nest be empty.

He turned back.

As he mounted the steps, turning suddenly for this purpose when he had repassed the house, he laid his plans.

His idea was to surprise the woman of plots and to face her for the last time, accusing her of the crime which he was sure she had committed.

But all at once the door opened before he could ring, and he came face to face with a man.

Jasper Joyce fell back with a start, and the man in the hall recoiled at sight of him.

This unexpected collision was ludicrous, but the two men found themselves face to face in the hall and speechless.

The man before the detective was handsome, and wore a black beard.

As Jasper Joyce looked him in the eye, he detected a quiver, but it passed away in a moment.

"Come in. You want to see me, I suppose," said the one who had opened the door.

Jasper did not hesitate, but walked into the house and was conducted into the parlor at one side of the hall.

There the man shut the door and stood in the middle of the floor.

Which one was this—Theron or Jorrock?

The detective looked the man over from head to foot, and saw that he was remarkably cool.

"I don't think the lady is at home," he said, calmly. "I haven't seen her since I came in."

"You have been waiting for her, then?"

"I have."

Jasper looked around the room and saw the tiger-skins he had seen on a former visit. Not one had been disturbed.

The man stood like a statue where he had stopped, and at last Jasper turned to him again.

"If you are waiting for her, we might wait together," he said.

"Yes, that would surprise her when she comes; but you need not wait."

"Why not?"

There was a quick movement on the stranger's part and he was at the table in a moment.

One of his hands rested on the edge of the board, and while the detective looked, he saw something glitter in the other.

"Don't disturb yourself," said the dark faced one. "I will change my plan. You will wait for the tigress. I will not."

The glittering thing that came up and stopped on a level with Jasper's face was a revolver and he looked along the barrel into the eyes behind it.

"I know," he said. "You are Jorrock."

"You are wrong. I am the other one!"

A smile accompanied these words and the eye behind the revolver seemed to get a mad light.

"You are Theron."

"I am Theron—Theron of the old League. You know something about it, Jasper Joyce, and that is why you are going to wait for Zira in this house."

"And you?"

"Oh, after that we will find her all the same. This woman cannot escape us."

He was the essence of coolness. This man who a few hours before had played the coward, was calm and bloodthirsty. He had gone to Nickum Nox to have the letter taken from his back; but now, with it still there by some hocus-pocus of the old man's, he had recovered his nerve and was as cool as Jorrock.

"Sit down. There's no use of standing up. One can die sitting as well as standing."

Jasper Joyce did not care to sit, but the revolver that covered him seemed to enforce the demand and he dropped upon the sofa at which he was standing.

"You've been on the trail some time," said Theron.

"That is my business."

"Of course. You have picked up link after link and you think you have almost all."

"Do you think so, Theron?"

The listener smiled.

"You have had two trails to puzzle you. In the first place, you found no visible marks on the body of the victim; in the other you saw a dagger in the heart of the dead man."

"That is right."

"Do you think the same hand killed both, Jasper Joyce?"

"I do not."

"Ah, you know it did not. You have had for your helper the girl in the old house where the two men died. She has come to your aid on more than one occasion. She is pretty and shrewd; but now she is not so anxious to avenge Miles Maccoon's death."

"You know this, do you?"

"I have it from her own lips. She has made a discovery which has changed her opinion of the man whom she almost called father. She started out to avenge him, but now she cares very little whether he is avenged or not."

This was true, as the detective knew by his interview with Minon.

"Let us get to the end of this business. See what a nest Zira had here."

"You call her Zira, I see."

"That is her best name though she has several. Here she was the Countess Violet. Had a Russian husband at one time, according to the story she has sent out. That was all a myth. She never had a husband. She was a tigress from childhood and capable of giving people some trouble."

"She seems to have given you and Jorrock some."

"That was her mission in life. Here she surrounded herself with wealth and lived in this house a part of the double life of which you know something."

"I know of it," said the detective. "I have seen her in both roles."

"Zira is a strange woman. She fears as Zira, but as the Countess she has all the courage of the lion. Let me show you something."

Without taking his eyes from the detective, Theron crossed the room threw back one of the tiger-skins and revealed a door in the wall.

Jasper Joyce looked and saw in the niche a manikin which led him to recall the story told by Chatters.

"You see how she passed a part of her existence here," said Theron, with a wave of the hand.

The dummy was lifelike and the ferret saw that it resembled Theron, even to the color of the eyes.

"I have examined it closely," continued the man of the Brotherhood. "It has three sets of eyes which can be brought forward at will. They are dark gray eyes now like mine. When she last practiced on the manikin, I was uppermost in her mind."

"Do you mean to tell me that she vented some of her rage on that figure?"

"Much of it, but it was only practice. It was to keep her hate warm and to inspire her vengeance."

"She must hate you."

"That is not the word. There is no word that can convey the full meaning of that creature's feelings toward Jorrock and I. Now, we will come to terms."

The skin dropped and Theron came back across the carpet in which his feet made no noise.

"You are the man on the trail and consequently our enemy," he said. "You are the restless Javert on the track of the clue. You must die!"

Jasper Joyce looked at the man and saw the hand grip firmer than before the butt of the re-

volver about which the fingers had wound themselves.

"Stand up, Jasper Joyce."

This command, uttered in the sternest tones, fell upon the detective's ears like a knell of doom and he stood up, but at the same time advanced one foot like a man getting ready for a desperate move.

"For you the game has ended. For the woman it will end soon," continued Theron. "The clue will never be worked out and the mystery will forever remain unsolved."

The detective did not speak.

"We will go back to the tropic isle after the last blow and the deeds of the past will never stand revealed, for the girl will not try to sift the one and the police will not find out the other. The Branded 'D's' will have accomplished their work, and the man who betrayed them in the far-off land and escaped to America will sleep unavenged, as the girl desires."

The revolver came up as the last word was spoken, and as the detective looked into its muzzle once more he heard the startling sentence that fell from Theron's tongue:

"Dog of a tracker, die!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE VANISHMENT OF NICKUM NOX.

THE ferret of New York expected to receive the death-shot immediately after the words that saluted his ears.

The figure of Theron took on a cool look and the revolver seemed to be pushed into his very face.

But the report, the flash, came not.

All at once Theron moved back and touched the table.

The weapon fell to a level with his hip and he looked at the detective but with a changed face.

"Go," he cried. "Go out and finish the game," he waved his hand toward the door.

Jasper Joyce, bewildered, did not stir.

"I thought you were going to kill me," he said.

"I can't, and yet I am Theron. I can't shoot you down and yet you will hunt us like a bloodhound and you will have no mercy. Go out and do your duty."

Strange words these from the lips of the very man he wanted.

Jasper Joyce listened to them as he had never listened before to any sentence.

"You are not Jorrock, for, from what I know of him, I would not be facing you at this moment," said Jasper.

"It is well for you that I am not Jorrock. He is the man who has nerve. He is the lion of the family. He is the merciless man from the tropics."

The voice ceased and Theron laid the revolver on the table.

Then he sat down and leaned his head on his hand.

Jasper watched him a moment and advanced.

"You don't go?" said Theron. "You forget that I may become tiger again and then you would not be safe."

"You are going to remain?"

"I came here to wait for her."

"She may not come."

"If she does not, I will go out and find her."

"You may not know where to look."

"I will find her!" repeated Theron. "I will find her sooner than you will if you don't quit this house."

Jasper Joyce feared this. He did not want Zira to fall into the hands of the brothers and he resolved that she should not.

"I will go," said he.

"That is right. Remember that Jorrock is out there."

"I know where Jorrock is," was the reply.

At the door the ferret looked back at Theron. His hand had wandered to the revolver lying on the table; the soft dark fingers had partly closed about it, and his eyes were regarding him with something of their old fire.

With another glance, the detective opened the door and passed out.

It was a strange adventure.

He had stood face to face with one of the Dastard D's; had been at his mercy, and had escaped.

It had given him a chance to analyze Theron's character to some extent.

The man had moods, and strange ones at that. He was a man of fits and turns, and sometimes the tiger was uppermost in his nature and now fear gnawed at his heart.

"That is not the man Minon saw in the hall the night Gorell Grimm died," said the detective to himself while he walked away. "He is not the one who stopped the current of life that night. No, it was the other. It was Jorrock."

As he turned from the house Jasper Joyce recalled all the events of the past few days.

He put this and that together and made a new chain.

He wanted Jorrock now, but at the same time Theron was just as dangerous.

He had the Brotherhood against him and Zira was fighting them both.

It was natural that after his last adventure he should seek the abode of Nickum Nox, the Magic Chemist.

As he reached the door he was startled by a placard fastened to it, and falling back he read:

"FOR RENT."

INQUIRE ON SECOND FLOOR."

If Jorrock himself had opened the door, the detective could not have been more astonished.

He tried the door, but it was locked. He almost felt like throwing himself against it and breaking it open as if the solution of the mystery lay beyond.

Nickum Nox gone?

It did not seem reasonable.

"I'll see," cried the detective, rushing down-stairs and into the room whose door announced that some one inside had the renting of the different apartments in the building.

He found sitting behind a desk a little man with a chubby face and this individual greeted Jasper with a business grin.

"What became of the man up-stairs—the old chemist who moved within the last few hours?"

"Don't know, sir."

"He has given up the rooms?"

"Yes, sir."

"Unexpectedly to you?"

"I should say so."

"Did he say why? What was his plea?"

"He hadn't any. Said he would move, that was all, and we never ask questions."

"Then, you can't tell where he went."

"We can't."

Jasper had to smile at the curtness of the little man's responses.

"He said his rent, didn't he?" he asked.

"Paid in advance. Has for ten years. Best renter we ever had in the building."

"When did he go?"

"I can't tell you, sir. He left word here just as we were closing up for the night and this morning we found that the rooms were vacated. It was neatly done."

"Strange."

"Do you want to look at the rooms?"

"If you please, I will."

The little man took a key from a drawer at his right and handed it to Jasper.

The city ferret went back up-stairs. He opened the door and walked into the rooms lately occupied by Nickum Nox. But what could he expect to find there? Of course the old man, if he wanted secrecy, would leave no clue behind; he had simply vanished for some reason and did not want any one to know what had become of him.

Jasper walked to the little cupboards and examined them. Every thing had been cleaned out; the chemical apparatus had disappeared and the various vials had gone with them.

A man couldn't make a move like this one without help, thought the detective. Nickum Nox couldn't carry off all the things and vanish like vapor.

He must have had help.

Jasper looked as long as he thought necessary and then went out. He left the key in the lower office with his thanks and kept on down-stairs.

On one of the lower steps his foot touched something and he picked up a very small vial.

"I thought so. He didn't vanish like a moon-beam," smiled the ferret. "Old Nickum went away just like any other person. This bottle tells the story."

He kept on down-stairs and stopped in the doorway a moment.

Some ragged boys were playing on the walk and a bright little fellow who caught the detective's eye came forward at his beck.

"You live in the block, don't you?" asked Jasper.

"Six of us live in one room."

"You don't go to bed early, I guess."

"Not these warm nights. We stay up and get the air."

"You were up last night, weren't you?"

"Till after twelve."

"You saw the man move out?"

In a moment the face of the boy became as expressionless as a clam.

"I suppose he told you not to say anything about it, if any one asked you; but you see he forgot me, an old friend, and I must find him, for it is a case of life and death."

"Are you his friend?"

"I am."

"And he went off without leaving you his address?"

"Yes."

The boy took a good look at Jasper. He was still suspicious and the detective held his breath.

"Come away from that man!" called a voice from an upper window at this supreme moment.

"Don't you know what you were told, Johnny Jacks?"

The boy looked up at the ogreish face and retreated.

The game was lost and the detective turned to see the boy dart away.

At the same time he turned his head and caught a glimpse of the face at the window and knew that no clue was to be had in that direction.

Baffled in the attempt to find a clue to Nickum Nox's whereabouts, Jasper walked away.

Half-way down the block he was touched by a hand and the same boy looked up into his face.

"She won't see us now," he said. "She made me promise when I went off with the load to say nothing about the old man."

"You went off with the goods, did you?"

"Yes; I rode off on the things to hold some of them on the wagon."

Light was breaking again.

"Where did he go?" asked Jasper.

"It's funny, but it's true. You wouldn't believe it, but I'll up my hand to every word. He dumped everything, the queer looking things, the bottles and all, into the river."

"No, he didn't do that," cried the detective.

"Nickum Nox wouldn't destroy his precious property in that vandal manner."

"But he did. Didn't I watch him as he had the cart driven to one of the piers where all was quiet and didn't he dump them into the river as if he was drowning a lot of kittens?"

"After that, what?"

"Well, he came back and we went away."

"Not back to the house yonder?"

"Mercy no," cried the boy. "He dismissed me with a dollar and I ran home when we got to the street down there."

"Then you don't know where he went?"

"I don't."

"But who helped him off with the goods? Who took care of the cart, I mean?"

"Bill, down in the alley. I know Bill, and if he is about two sheets in the wind he will let the cat out of the bag, if he can."

"Show me where the cart shed is."

This the boy willingly agreed to do, and a minute later the detective opened the door of a low shed and walked into a dirty place full of foul smells.

"Bill's in his usual condition, but at night he's all right," said the urchin, pointing to a man lying doubled up in a cart.

Jasper roused the drunken fellow and at last got his eyes open.

"What became of the man you unloaded at the river last night?" he asked sternly.

"Got himself another roosting-place, ha, ha," grinned the man sitting up in the cart. "What was the matter with him? Threw all his traps into the river. I said nothing, for it wasn't my business. I works for money, you see."

Jasper laid something in the man's palm.

"I want to find my friend and take care of him," he said at the same time.

"All right. I piped him to the new den just for luck. He's down on Bleeker, Number —, and you'll find him there if he isn't in the mad-house."

Jasper Joyce drew back and was off.

"Something startling has happened to you, Nickum Nox," he said.

CHAPTER XXV.

ALWAYS JORROCK.

IN a crazy-looking house and the last room back on the third floor sat a man who, while he looked something like our old friend Nickum Nox the Magic Chemist of New York, seemed to have undergone a startling change of some kind.

The room was almost bare of furniture, and, besides a table and a chair, there was little else.

Yet, this man was Nickum Nox. He had changed his quarters so quick that as we have seen he had not informed his friend, the ferret, of the change, and now he sat alone in the room watching the door as if he expected the bailiff to enter.

When he heard a step outside he started up and standing in the middle of the room, glared at the portal with his hand on the back of the chair as if ready to lift it in self-defense.

All at once a rap sounded on the door and he crossed the floor.

He listened at the portal with his eyes full of fire and his dark hands shut.

The knock was repeated.

"Who's out there?" asked the man.

"One who must see you."

"My God!" cried Nickum Nox falling back. "He has found me. He of all men, and yet I ought to see him."

He opened the door, stepping back as he did so, and then stopping and looking at the person who entered.

Jasper Joyce had found the old chemist.

Nickum shut the door when the detective was fairly inside and then turned on him with a smile.

"One can't hide from you," he said.

"Why did you try?" was the reply.

There was no answer for a moment, the old man sitting with his hands crossed in his lap and his whole aspect one of terror.

"Must I tell you?" he said. "You know what I have already told you about my past? You know how I lost my child years ago, and how she gave me trouble in Trinidad?"

"I know that, but why should you go away from the old place? You even destroyed your chemicals last night. You threw them into the river; exchanging the place you had for this den."

"It was sudden," said the old man. "It came without warning. It was one of these thunderbolts you can't look for."

"A thunderbolt, eh?"

"Yes."

Jasper waited for him to go on. He saw that in time the old man would part with the secret and he let him have his time.

"She came back—came across me when I did not look for anything of the kind. It was like a serpent hissing in one's path."

"Your wife?"

"My wife."

"You mean that she came up from the tropics?"

"From somewhere—Hades, perhaps."

"And she saw you?"

"No, but I saw her."

"And fled?"

"Yes. I was seized with a terror that is nameless. I parted with everything I had and came here. I had to get out of her road."

"Where is she?"

"Don't ask me. I saw her on the street yesterday, even brushed her, and if she had been looking, she must have seen me start."

"It is evident that she frightened you, Nickum," said Jasper. "But why should she? You told me that she said she would never cross your path again, and she may not have known that you were here, nor—"

"You don't know the creature," was the response. "You have never seen this woman nurtured under a tropical sun, and with the blood of tigers in her veins. If I had the courage I would show you something, I would disclose a secret which I have kept from all human kind."

"Just as you please. I shall not insist."

The Magic Chemist tried to pull himself together, and succeeded after an effort.

"We will go," said he, rising. "I am about to give you a secret connected with this trail of which you have never dreamed. I am going to show you who killed Gorell Grimm, and how it was done."

"Was the man mad?"

Nickum Nox drew his hat over his eyes and went to the door. Looking out, he returned and laid his hand on the detective's arm.

"It is not here. It is half-way across the city. I can show you, and then you must let me hide. Will you do that, Jasper?"

"If such be your wish, yes."

They went out, Nickum leading the way, and Jasper at his heels. On the street below the old man called a cab and both got in.

"No. — Eighth avenue," said the chemist, and the detective looked at him, amazed.

"Do you know who inhabits that house?" he asked.

"I know who did," was the answer as the cab rattled off.

When the vehicle drew up in front of the place, Nickum Nox alighted and looked up at the windows.

It was the house made notorious by the two mysterious tragedies which had taken place there, and Jasper followed the old man up the steps.

Minon opened the door, and they were shown into the library.

"It was in this room," said the chemist when the girl, with a look at the old man, had withdrawn. "I have come to give you the clue to the first crime."

"Go on."

"The best ferrets err sometimes. They stick to one trail too long and fail to net their prey. The girl saw him that night."

"She saw some one in the hall, saw him enter this room and watched him when he emerged."

"I know that."

"Where were you?"

Hickum Nox passed his hand across his brow.

"Where was I?" he said in a voice just lifted above a whisper. "I was in this house."

"You were?"

"I was here."

"Come," cried the detective. "You must be ready to run away again. But this time you have no apparatus to throw into the river. You were not here that night."

The old man rose and crossed the room.

"You doubt me, Jasper. I don't blame you. I have secrets which you never dream of. See here! Does the girl know this?"

He put out his hand and touched a certain place on the wall. A door opened and a dark place became visible.

"I was there. I came to this house on business that night and I was here when the blow fell."

"In that place?"

"Yes. I saw it all."

"This is the secret you have kept from me, is it?"

"It is one of them."

The old man came back and resumed his seat.

"Minon saw the man," said he. "She saw him

from the steps and his eyes spelled her. She saw him from the stairs and yet she could not stir. He had that gift from childhood. He was a marvelous boy. He and his brother. Wait! I would like to ask Minon a question."

Jasper Joyce rose and called the girl into the room.

As she came forward her eyes caught Nickum's and she suddenly stopped.

A tremor was seen to pass over Minon's frame and the old man in the chair at the desk tried to rise but fell back.

"Minon," said Jasper, "Mr. Nox here wishes to ask you a question."

"I am at his service."

The Magic Chemist turned again to Minon, but his tongue would not work.

"Why don't you proceed?" said the detective.

He tried again, and this time got out two words, then stopped as before.

"Is the gentleman ill?" asked Minon.

"Not ill. I am not ill, but my God! where did that young lady get those eyes?"

Minon started to her feet and looked at the detective.

"What does he mean?" she cried.

Old Nox had also risen; he advanced toward Minon and then stopped once more.

"They are just like hers," he said. "They call you Minon, don't they, and you are his heir? You saw a man in the house that night. You stood on the stairs and he in the hall. His eyes spelled you, didn't they, and you could not move till he had vanished?"

"Ah, that is too true. His face seemed to fascinate me and I was at that strange man's mercy."

"And when you entered this room all was over and Gorell Grim was dead."

"Dead," said Minon. "I found him dead as if some hand had strangely killed him."

"It is true," and Nickum Nox looked at the ferret. "It all happened as she says. But she did not see what I saw. She did not witness the sting of the topical snake."

"Did you?" cried Minon rushing forward.

"Did you see it done?"

"I witnessed all."

"Then you know—"

"I know who killed him."

Minon seemed to recall the story of the writing on the back of the old map for she suddenly turned pale.

"That man is the person who wants your secret—not I," said she, pointing to Jasper Joyce. "Is that all you want to tell me?"

"No," cried Nickum Nox, "there is one thing more. Come here, girl."

Minon advanced and stopped in front of him.

"Hold out your arm."

She hesitated, looking at him as if she doubted his sanity.

"Let me see. Let me look a moment. You shall not be injured. I must see."

He caught her arm and gripped it savagely.

He seemed to sink his fingers into the wrist, and his eyes got a wild light.

In an instant he pulled up the open sleeve and bent over the alabaster arm.

"Merciful God!" he cried, dropping the member as he staggered to his feet. "I might have known it before I looked!"

Minon's face had no color at all and she watched the workings of the old man's lips while he stared at her from a yard away.

He had seen something on the girl's fair skin which she had kept from Jasper Joyce. His eyes had found that which until that hour had been one of her secrets; and trembling in the middle of the floor, he stood and stared like one mad.

"Where is your mother, girl?" he suddenly asked.

Minon shook her head.

"Perhaps you can tell me," she said.

"I might," he laughed. "I might tell you more than you want to hear; but I will not. Your mother! Don't let her cross your path."

Nickum Nox darted across the room at the conclusion of his warning, and nearly pulled Jasper Joyce from his chair.

"Come! I have seen enough. I have shown you the clue."

"But you have not told me all. You have showed where you were when the blow fell; but you haven't named the murderer."

"Not here; not in her presence."

The detective waved Minon aside and she left the room. Old Nox's eyes followed her till the door had closed upon her figure.

"I might have thought it," he muttered. "I might have suspected that he was the man. But let me see? Where was I? I was in that niche in the wall when the black-bearded man was alone with Gorell Grimm. I saw it all. The touch on the hand which carried into the victim's blood the poison of the tropics; the fall back in the chair, the murderer's look of triumph; his departure and after that my vanishment."

"What brought you to this house that night?" asked Jasper.

"You cannot guess and yet you might," was the reply. "You saw the 'D' on the dead man's back?"

"I saw it."

"I came to rid him of the brand of the League. I came to rob him of that which he had carried so long; Jasper Joyce, you will have to find Jorroch and tell him that his time has come."

The detective knew what that meant. It was always Jorroch.

CHAPTER XXVI.

VENGEANCE AND HER DECOY.

THE next day and the next passed and there were no new revelation, in the game.

The detective may have struck a new trail, but if he did neither Minon in the old house nor Nickum Nox knew anything about it.

What had become of Violet—Violet, the woman wanted by the two brothers of the Dastard D's? Had she fallen beneath their hands, or was she in hiding somewhere or playing a hand as good as theirs?

Violet was not the creature to let the hunt rest. She had resumed the one-to-be-dreaded nature of her strange make-up, and if Theron had failed to deal with her, Jorroch might succeed better.

It was near the close of the day when the streets are thick with shadows and when the figures of those that throng them look weird and misty, that a woman came out of a house and walked away.

There was nothing out of the ordinary in her appearance; she was dressed in black and walked off with an agile step which told that she had not passed down the shady side of life.

Her eye keen and eager glanced about her as she advanced, and all at once she dodged into a place and vanished.

Once in the hall which was darker than the street she produced a key from her pocket and opened a door.

She locked the door behind her and turned on the gas just enough to relieve the gloom. Then she sat down and took a bit of newspaper from her dress.

"I may have baited the trap in vain," said she, half aloud. "I have tried the one which I think will catch him, but if it fails, why I will have to try again."

The bit of paper was nothing less than an advertisement which had been clipped from a morning paper, and the woman read it for perhaps the twentieth time as she leaned forward:

"If Morano will call at No. 665 M— street, between six and seven to-night he will learn something that will benefit his future."

"CANO."

That was all.

As the white lips of the woman who had not removed her thin veil read these words she lifted one of her hands to the table and clinched it there.

Suddenly she raised her veil and the face of Violet stood revealed. So Violet was "Cano," and "Cano" was a name intended to deceive some one.

She watched the door but no one came. She rose and went to the window, looking out upon the street; but she saw no one stop at the door near the blinds.

"He will not come or else he did not see the paper," she said. "The name would startle him, if any one would, for he has not forgotten Cano."

Ten minutes passed and still she was the sole occupant of the trap she had baited.

"Some other time, perhaps, but how can I wait with my blood at fever heat? How can I wait longer for the man whom I want at the point of my dagger? Why don't he come?"

Violet turned the light low and started up again.

"I can go to the other one, but I wanted him last," she went on. "I wanted to let him be the last of the trio. Theron was to have been the second one and— At last."

A rap had sounded on the door, and she had started across the room eager to admit the visitor.

"He is here!" she said as she opened the door and then she fell back with a start, for before her stood not a man as she had expected, but Chatters.

Violet started at the boy and drew back to let him come in.

"Guess you weren't looking for me," said Chatters with a grin as he came in. "I couldn't help it, you know, for I thought you would be anxious to hear some news."

"Who told you?" broke in Violet.

"I'll tell you. It was by accident. You left a lot of writing in the room, you see, and I went there to find you; but I ran across it, I picked up what appeared to be some writing and read it. It said that if some one wanted to hear of something to his advantage he would consult 'Cano' at this place to-night."

"You found that on the floor of the room, did you?"

"Yes."

"What a fool I was," said Violet. "I thought I had destroyed the personal that did not please me."

"But you didn't, you see," said Chatters. "I took you to be the 'Cano' mentioned in the personal and that's why I'm here."

Violet smiled at the boy's shrewdness and resumed her seat.

"What news have you?" asked the woman.

"They have taken the old oath over."

"What old oath?"

"The one they took long ago—the first one," they call it."

"How do you know this, boy?"

"I saw and heard."

"Where did it take place?"

"Where Jorroek lives."

"And that oath means death for me?"

"Yes."

She looked at him a moment without speaking, and perhaps the boy thought she was about to turn Zira again and fill her soul with fears.

"Did they touch the 'D' after the oath?"

"They did."

"Then it was the old vow renewed. It was the same one which they took on the island and which has expired."

"Yes, they said it had run out."

"It was a vow to kill—to hunt me down and to go back to the tropics after that."

"That was it exactly. Why didn't you remain where you were when you sent me after Jasper Joyce?"

A smile came to the woman's lips.

"I didn't care to," she replied. "I simply changed my mind, Chatters. Did he come?"

"Yes, and couldn't find you at all."

"Perhaps not. I will not send for him again till I am ready to see him. That may not be very long any more. So they want me?"

"That they do."

"Jorroek and Theron! Pasca is not with them any longer. Pasca has left the trail. He did they say at the post of duty. Poor Pasca!"

Even the boy could see that her last words were sarcasm, and the flash that lit up her eyes while she spoke told him that he was looking into the face of a cool creature.

"He won't come, I guess," said Violet. "It is nearly seven now."

"He's here now."

Some one was at the door and no place to hide Chatters.

Violet sprang up like a pantheress and ran to where the boy sat.

She caught him by the arm and looked for some place to hide him; but it was not in that room.

"Why did you come here?" she hissed. "You miserable little rat, why did you come to the trap I had set for him?"

"Didn't know it was a trap," said Chatters.

For half a second Violet stood undecided, with her fingers sinking into the boy's arm, and then she dragged him to the table, underneath which she flung him with an injunction to remain silent and breathe on his peril.

The boy crouched in the shadows there and waited.

He saw Violet go toward the door and pause there a moment before she opened it.

She had pulled down her veil again and as she opened the door, she fell back so as not to let the light fall upon her face.

A man came in.

Chatters saw that he was tall and handsome and that as he looked at Violet he stopped as if the veiled face had told him that he had fallen into a snare.

"So you are here," said the woman as she shut the door and dextrously turned the key.

"I am here, madam. I saw your 'personal' and if you are 'Cano' you will remove that veil."

"In a moment," answered the woman coming toward the table with a quick glance at the boyish figure hugging the floor underneath it.

"In a moment 'Morano.' How do you like the name? It sounds like old times, eh? And you had not heard mine for years?"

"Not for years, and if you are the real 'Cano' of the old nest, why, I—"

"Look!"

The veil went up and there was a quick start and a swift cry on the man's part.

He fell against the table, his hands lifted as if in sudden fear and his voice a quivering groan.

Violet stood before him. Violet had decoyed Theron to the trap, and the tall man before her seemed to have lost every vestige of courage, and that after he had clasped hands with Jorroek over the table swearing that he would help hunt down this very avenger of the trail.

"You know me now," cried Violet. "Cano? I thought the name would decoy you. I knew of no other bait and that is how I came to bait this bait with it. You may stand there and look at me. The last time you fooled me. You left a dummy in your couch and I, eager and blood-blinded, struck without looking. But this time it shall not be thus. This time I will not fail."

She fell back, leaving Theron at the table, his eyes wild and blood-shot, gazing at her, and his whole soul lost in a spasm of fear.

Breathless indeed was the boy under the table.

Chatters had passed through some eventful episodes, but none like the present one.

He felt his heart in his throat and while he looked out he thought that the keen eye of Violet, the huntress, was watching him and not Theron.

"You know why I do this," continued Violet. "You know why you are hunted down like a wolf. You know that I would break my oath if I spared one of you. You know where my brother is—the man whom you inveigled into the Brotherhood, and whom you almost forced to become a traitor to be killed at last in this very city. What avails you now the poisoned pin you carry in your pocket, the one in the silver case? You can't reach it now, Theron. You can't retreat from the death that menaces you. I am not Zira to-night. I am Violet."

"She's a devil that's what she is," thought Chatters, who heard every impassioned word.

"Was there ever a woman like that one?"

He saw that Violet stood some distance from the man and that the naked dagger which she gripped was clutched at the point and that her hand was drawn back for the throw.

"Just like she used to throw it at the manikin," said the boy. "She has a living target now."

So she had; a target of flesh and blood—the broad bosom of Theron of the Dastard D's.

"You next and then Jorroek!" said Violet. "I am going to beat the detective out of his prize. He has worked hard. He has picked up the chain link by link, and he knows the guilty ones. He knows perhaps who left Pasca—they called him Gaspard here, you know—dead in his chair; but he will not find anything in his hand when he closes it. I will beat this shrewd hunter of men and women. I have the winning card and he will fail."

"Why don't you throw your accursed knife, woman?" said Theron, wonderfully cool with death in front of him. "Why don't you carry out your threat? You are liable to become Zira if you wait and then you will never win."

She laughed at him and seemed to come forward.

Theron drew back; he even put his hand on the table, and seeing the glitter of the dagger's point almost at his heart, he tried to avoid it with startling results.

The table toppled and there was a cry from beneath it, and as the man reeled away a boy sprang up from the falling thing, and fell between the woman and her prey.

It was the unexpected which had happened.

As Chatters collided with Violet to be thrown aside in an instant, Theron dashed across the room and caught the door-knob. A wrench followed—all his strength was in it—the door yielded, and as he tore it open, he threw himself forward and vanished like a frightened wolf!

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE ARREST OF THERON.

"It was your fault. You did it!" cried Violet when she realized that her enemy had escaped her, and she caught the trembling boy and jerked him from the floor. "I have a mind to wring your neck, for if you had not come, the table would not have been overturned, and I would have ended Theron of the Brotherhood."

But she released Chatters as suddenly as he had been caught up, and looking at the open door, she sprang to it, but no one was in sight.

The man had escaped. Theron was beyond her power once more.

Violet came back and sunk onto a chair. All her energy was gone again, and she was fast resuming the role of Zira, when she would fear the work of the Dastard D's.

The boy watched her, saying nothing. He dared not interfere with the thoughts of the woman whom he had seen in a rage with the dagger in her hand and her face turned toward Theron, who had come to the trap which she had set for him.

At last, as the woman buried her face in her hands, the boy saw his opportunity and slid from the room. He tip-toed to the door, and with one more look at Violet, who had not seen him, he passed out, leaving her alone.

"The next time there will be no table to slide," said Chatters. "I don't want to be present then, and I will make it a point not to be."

He had seen enough, and while he glided toward the lights that seemed to lose themselves in the long stretch of street, he congratulated himself that he had gotten off so well.

Violet roused herself at last. She saw that the boy had stolen off, and that she had been left alone.

Near the table lay the dagger which she had intended for Theron of the branded back, but it was bloodless.

"Maybe I censured the boy wrongly," she said. "He did not know that I had a trap set for the man, and his shrewdness and desire to help me brought him to this house. He has been kind and faithful to me, and I will not censure him for Theron's escape."

Five minutes later she was beyond the house, and no one would have thought that the black-robed figure carried beneath its veil the searching eyes of an avenger.

And Theron? What had become of him?

The branded man should have congratulated himself over his lucky escape from the avenger's dagger, but did he?

But for the sliding of the table and Chatters's efforts to escape being crushed, he might be in the trap yet, a dead man, and forever out of the game. And Jorroek might be the only one left for the woman or the grip of the detective.

Theron hastened away. He did not pause till he reached a certain spot, and there he entered a house and found his way to an upper floor.

"I could choke the old wretch," he grated. "I will tell him that he did not do what he promised to do, and if he fails again I will leave him dead among his retorts."

The knock which he bestowed on a door elicited no response and he turned the knob.

Then and not until then did he see the placard that hung before him.

It was the same that startled Jasper Joyce when he went to Nickum Nox's room to see the old chemist.

"Gone, eh?" said Theron, as he gazed.

"Well, maybe he saved himself some trouble by moving. But I would like to see the old man. I want to tell him that he is a rascal. The mark is still on my back, for Jorroek saw it when we renewed the oath."

Disappointed, Theron crept slowly down the stairs and out into the street again. He would have given much to have found the old chemist at home, but he had to depart without having that satisfaction.

Theron slipped through the shadows and vanished again. There had come to this man-tiger's face the look of fear which takes possession of those who lose their heads in danger.

What if he had renewed the oath with Jorroek? What if they had sworn over his table to stand together and get the best of Violet and the detective?

In spite of this he was a coward once more. Violet might be on his trail at that time and he did not know which way to turn.

The 'D' brand bothered him most.

It seemed to burn his flesh like a red-hot iron; it gave him a good deal of trouble, and he wanted to be rid of it.

He recalled his adventure in Violet's house with the detective and thought that he would know Jasper Joyce on sight.

But it was not so with Violet.

She could assume many disguises, and she would not hesitate to do so in order to carry out her oath.

"The girl is pretty," said Theron, as he thought of Minon and his interview at her home. "She has her mother's face and her father's temper. Miles Maccoon kept his secret well and Minon grew to womanhood without knowing that she was a stolen bit of flesh, and never dreaming that her father was so near. I think I'll have my divide now."

He turned suddenly and went toward Broadway.

As he flitted along he looked nervous, but by and by it left him as if he could shake it off, and when he ran up a flight of steps he was cool once more.

Theron took a key from his pocket and opened a door. He let himself into Jorroek's room, but Jorroek was not there.

Lighting the gas, but letting it burn low, he went to the table and sat down.

"He won't be apt to disturb my work for a spell," said he in an undertone. "I won't take more than my share and I know what that is."

After awhile he went behind a curtain that shielded a part of the room and came back with a box in his hands.

With this box he returned to the table and resumed the chair.

"I will leave the best for him. I won't take the ones he has admired. He shall have them, for I think they naturally belong to him."

He opened the little box and revealed a lot of diamonds that almost blinded him with their scintillations.

They covered the velvet floor of the box and for some time Theron did not venture to disturb them.

"They are the same. Some of these Miles Maccoon brought from the island and others he bought after he came to New York. He had intended that they should adorn Minon's wedding garments; but if she marries the detective, why, she will have to go diamondless, ha, ha! Or she can wear the paste ones—those which Pasca substituted while at the post of duty."

Theron took out some of the diamonds and made a selection which would have made a connoisseur's eyes water.

He left the largest in the box and made his selection with a smile on his face.

"I haven't taken the lion's share," said he. "That belongs to Jorroek. He shall have the best, and if he misses me, he will not think that I have gone off with that which is not mine by right."

As he thought he had plenty of time he took off his coat and sewed the diamonds up in a little bag which in turn he placed in the lining of his right sleeve.

This done to his satisfaction, he put the rest away and came back to the table again.

He was ready now. Theron had resolved to get out of reach of the dagger carried by the enemy of the Brotherhood—Violet, the woman from the island world.

He lowered the light and went out.

Safe at last and with a king's ransom sewed up in his sleeve!

Theron had never stolen from Jorrock before, but this theft, in his mind, was justifiable.

He looked back for some time after leaving the room, but after awhile he seemed to forget that he might have some one on his track, for he ceased his vigil and kept on and on till he reached the shipping.

Nothing animated his mind now but the one thought of escape.

No vessel would clear that night; he knew this, but early the next day several would sail and on one of these he might find passage.

As he leaned against a post with his face turned toward the water shining with the reflection of a thousand-and-one lights, Theron, the hunted, watched the waves as they played against the piers and the keels.

"Which ship do you belong to?" asked a voice at his elbow, and though it was not harsh or stern, the man started and looked at the questioner.

"I don't belong at all," said Theron. "But I wish I was on board of one of those vessels."

"Want to get away, eh?"

"I want to go away."

"Which way?"

Theron had watched the man, had looked him over from head to foot, and now he thought he saw something in the face that looked familiar and which recalled a former encounter with its owner.

He shut up like an oyster.

"There are several that clear to-morrow," continued the man, waving his hand toward the wharf. "You can take passage in that West Indian man there."

"Which one?" asked Theron in his eagerness.

"The one yonder. It's a fruit boat and a sailer, and while it would not carry you very fast it would be sure."

The speaker smiled, but Theron did not.

"That boat would take you back to Trinidad."

The words seemed to come from the man's tongue like a knell of sudden doom.

What did he know about Trinidad, and that he was at that time thinking of the far-away island.

"How do you know—" began Theron, when he stopped and looked at the man again.

"I ought to know where you would like to go just now. You came from Trinidad and it is but natural that your thoughts should wander back to the island. You are Theron!"

He did not start now. He merely leaned toward the man and saw that he had dark eyes and that he meant what he had just said.

"Theron, you need not go back to Trinidad," was the next sentence he heard. "I want you."

"You are a detective."

A hand fell upon Theron's arm at that moment, and as it closed gently but firmly there the hunted man recoiled but it was too late.

Jasper Joyce had found him!

"What do you want of me?" growled Theron, his old nature surging up in his blood as he thought that he had been tracked down by the cool-headed man of Gotham.

"If you will come with me you may know. There shall be no prison, at least not to-night, Theron; and then, while you are in my hands, she will not find you."

There was something in the last promise. Violet would not find him while he was under the detective's eye. The dagger which had nearly taken his life in the trap she had set for him, could not reach his heart while the stalwart figure of the spotter stood between.

Theron glanced once more at the vessel bound for the West Indies; he looked again at the man who had tracked him down, perhaps from Jorrock's room, and then he said:

"I am going with you, Jasper Joyce. I intend to hold you to your last words."

"A promise which shall be faithfully kept," was the answer, and the following moment the two men were walking back from the wharf with their elbows touching.

Jasper conducted Theron back to the little room on Grand, near Broadway, and when he had closed the door behind them, slipping the bolt so noiselessly that even the keen ears of his prisoner did not hear, he looked at him in the full light of the gas.

"You were going away, Theron," said the detective. "You were going to give me the slip."

A smile played with the lips visible through the mass of beard as black as a raven's wing.

"You are right. I was going away."

"You were going back to Trinidad."

"Perhaps; but really I didn't care where I went."

"Just so you escaped the hand of Violet."

For the first time since his arrest Theron started.

"Why don't you arrest that murderess?" he cried.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE STARTLING UNREVEALED.

"WHY don't I arrest Violet?" said Jasper Joyce. "Time enough for that, Theron."

"But you let her run at large when you must know if you know anything that it was her dagger which settled Gaspard's career."

"Then you know who Gaspard was? You know that he was one of the Three."

Theron laughed.

"Gaspard was Pasca. You know that. I will not conceal it from you, for you are keen and have picked up a link here and a link there till you have the chain almost complete."

Jasper made no reply but looked at the face before him.

"I have promised you that Violet shall not find you again," he said at last. "You must have seen that woman lately."

"I saw her last night," answered the Dastard D with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Why didn't you finish her? You know that woman's mission. You know that she is on the trail of vengeance, that she has sworn her life against the Brotherhood, and that unless some hand comes between she will carry out her oath to the very letter."

"All this is known to me," said Theron. "I have lived in the shadow, of her infernal dagger a year, and since Miles Maccoon perished she has resharpened that blade and now carries it for two of us."

"You and Jorrock."

Theron drummed on the table with his soft fingers and the detective seemed to listen a moment.

"Why not tell me all?" Jasper said at length.

"And hang us both?" grinned Theron. "You don't know me, Jasper Joyce."

"You mean then that you will not tell anything?"

A moment's silence followed and Theron looked toward the door as if suddenly filled with a desire to rush from the room.

All at once he rose to his feet and drew his fine figure to its natural height, all the time watched by the cool detective. Jasper Joyce saw how athletic he was, and how well his garments fitted his frame.

"You ask me to break the greatest oath man ever took," said he, looking down upon Jasper.

"You expect me to violate all that is sacred in life—to betray Jorrock and to tell you all about the strange vendetta which has only transferred itself from an island in the sea to New York."

"I ask for that which will enable me to avenge the death of Pasca."

"No, you don't mean that. You avenge the death of Pasca, called Gaspard in the house where he died? You want to settle with the hand that silenced him? That is not your mission, Jasper Joyce."

"You have another mission. You want, first of all, to find the person who killed Miles Maccoon, called Gorell Grimm where he was known in this city. You must not come to Theron, expecting to make a traitor of him. You should go elsewhere."

"Very well," said Jasper. "I cannot agree to stand between you and the avenger."

"All right. Stand aside and let me out then. Open your door and I will walk out again, ready to fight to the bitter end. I will promise not to seek the piers. I will remain here and face the woman with the dagger. I will swear that she shall discover that we are more than her match and that she shall feel the hand of the Brotherhood on her, no matter how desperate and cunning she is."

The strange man's courage was coming back, and the detective while he watched him, saw that his face emphasized the words he had spoken.

"Theron, it is no use. You are in the toils," said Jasper.

"You mean that you intend to hold me?"

"Why not?"

"I never took a life. I never sent a soul unsummoned into the august presence of its Maker. It is true that I am Theron of the Brotherhood; but I never killed any one."

"You are in the plot. You have plotted; you have watched and pursued. You came up from Trinidad with the other two to clear the way. What say you to this?"

"Nothing."

"You are Jorrock's brother. You belong to the death-dealing League which came into existence in the warm seas. You know why it was formed, and why it has for its deadliest enemy a woman. You can tell me all this and more, too, Theron. But you say you will not."

A reply was at the listener's lips, but he seemed to beat it back.

Instead of answering, he moved one hand across the table and let it rest there palm up.

"It never shed blood, that hand!" said he with a look at the detective.

"But it has hunted. It has taken the vow the same as the lips, for it was raised toward heaven while the lips spoke."

"Yes, that is true."

The man from Trinidad looked at his hand again, and then caught Jasper's glance.

"You can go out," said the ferret. "I will

unlock the door. Go out, Theron, and face her again."

"What, you don't mean that?" cried the man at the table. "You don't bid me go out and face the woman who is our foe?"

"I mean it. She will find you as surely as fate, for while I don't want you, she does, and she will not give up till she has found her prey."

The hand of Theron wandered to his hat, but it did not lift it from the table.

To go out and be hunted again seemed worse than his present predicament. To pass from that house and into the streets, to be shadowed by Violet, the woman from the Caribbees, was to him a greater peril than that which environed him in the grip of the detective.

Jasper rose and opened the door.

This was proof that he meant what he had said, and when he came back to Theron he smiled at that man's dilemma.

"Shut the door," cried Theron. "Shut the door and I will tell you something."

The detective did so and slipped the bolt once more.

When he came back he quietly took a chair and drew it up to the table. Theron gazed at him a moment and then leaned back saying with a malicious eye:

"There was a time when I could have killed you and perhaps I should have done it. You are cool and merciless. You are determined to let the woman, the slayer of Pasca, get away."

"It may depend on what you say, Theron."

"If that is the case she shall hang," and the dark-brown hand of Theron fell upon the table like a hammer. "She shall hang, I say, if it depends on what I say."

He took a long breath and rested a moment. He seemed to be gathering himself for his narration; but now and then he appeared to shrink from the task.

Jasper Joyce waited with the patience of a true man-hunter.

He felt that he was near the end of the mystery and that the man before him would clear up all that was dark; so that he would have nothing to do but to pass from that room and stand face to face with Jorrock.

"We are brothers," said Theron. "The mother who ushered us into the world left it with our first cries, and she was spared the years that came with their crime and mysteries."

"Jorrock grew up unrestrained, but I—I had some learning for I had ambition. We lived on the Island of Trinidad and in its surf and beneath its mango trees we passed our boyhood. I was twenty years old when that woman crossed my path. She was a child then, but she was pretty and I was fascinated."

"To know something of what followed now let me use your wall," and Theron glanced toward the white wall of the detective's den.

"It is at your service," said Jasper.

Taking a pencil with a large head from his pocket, he arose and crossed the room, and in another moment he was drawing on the wall with the skill of a real artist.

First he drew a range of mountains and then a long stretch of sea-beach with here and there an indentation where the coves were. He proceeded till he had drawn a taking picture, with houses and huts and people.

"That is a part of Trinidad," said he, turning to the detective. "That was the paradise into which the serpent entered. There were two of us till the third man came—Pasca. Then in an evil moment was formed the Brotherhood which changed all our lives. A man was found dead in the grove over there where I have drawn the trees, a man whom we loved, for he was our father."

"We had enlarged our Order somewhat. We had taken into it a man who became its bane. The crime was secret, but we went to work. We discovered that the man whom we had taken into the Brotherhood knew something about it, but he denied."

"One night that man vanished. He went away in a vessel that cleared from Port-au-Prince and with him went the secret of the crime in the grove. Then began the long hunt for him; then commenced the search for the secret-keeper. We were baffled time and again by a woman, and wherever we went we found her shadow. Now she was afraid of us and now again she was a tigress. This double life she kept up, shielding the hunted man with her wiles and watching us all the time with an oath-bound purpose."

"Miles Maccoon, the hunted man, had grown rich when we found him. He was living in luxury with a beautiful girl whom he called his daughter, though she knew that she was only an adopted. We waited for the time. We watched the woman of the double life and she watched us. You may know something of this, Jasper Joyce."

"We knew that Violet had sworn to hunt us down and that she knew where the missing man lived. Miles Maccoon knew, too, that we were in New York. He had indubitable proof of our whereabouts, for he was warned, and so long as he wore on his back the brand of the Brotherhood, so long would he be under the ban."

"Time came for the stroke. Time came for

us to finish the work. We put Pasca on guard. We placed him where, as Gaspard Marks, he could watch the every-day life of the man we wanted; we had daily reports from him and we knew Miles Maccoon's secrets almost as well as he knew them himself. There was nothing between us and the death of the marked victim."

Theron paused and stepped back from the wall. He looked at the detective who had quietly taken in the story as far as it had gone, and for a moment he became silent.

"The very night came," continued Theron. "The very hour arrived when the man, marked in Trinidad, should perish in New York. Every detail of the removal had been discussed and settled upon. There was to be no mistake and no signs of murder. Miles Maccoon was to pass from life to death but ere he went he was to know whose hand it was."

"Well, the man died that night."

Theron said no more, but, stopping there, became as dumb as an oyster.

Jasper Joyce saw him look at the drawing on the wall and a singular gleam seemed to light up his eyes.

"You are not at the end of your narrative, Theron?" said the ferret.

"I am where I could stop and leave you still in the dark," was the reply.

"You say that Gorell Grimm died on the night set apart for his death by you three from the Caribbees?"

"He did. I believe that he died about the hour marked out for his doom."

"Which of you three did the deed—Jorroek, Pasca or yourself?"

A smile came to Theron's lips and he broke out into a low laugh.

"With all your acumen you men miss it sometimes. You can pick up links and astonish the world; but yet you fail. God knows how many innocent men you have cast into the net of guilt, to be strangled by your officers of the law. You have asked me a question which I intend to answer to the best of my belief. Which one of us killed Miles Maccoon in the house on the avenue? Neither!"

Jasper Joyce started and an incredulous look filled his eyes.

"Before heaven," cried Theron, rising solemnly, "it was not Jorroek, it was not Pasca, the deed; it was not Theron!"

"Then, whom?" asked Jasper.

"What is your mission, man? You are a solver of crimson riddles."

The man of many trails was astounded.

CHAPTER XXIX.

GHOST OR MAN.

THE New York detective felt like a man in a maze when the handsome figure of Theron swept from the room.

He did not try to stop him, even though he might go back to the game and step upon the trail in revenge with Jorroek.

He heard the feet of Theron on the stairs, and they died away while he listened.

At last he turned and looked at the drawing on the wall. It suggested repose and ease; he could see the long sweep of beach which the hand of Theron had drawn and the groups of trees where the men of the Dastard D's had been happy at one time.

It was a strange story Theron had told. While it dropped from his tongue in sentences somewhat disconnected, it was a startling narrative and the conclusion was more startling still.

Jasper Joyce wondered what the man meant when he affirmed that neither Jorroek, Pasca nor Theron had killed Miles Maccoon.

It was an ending which he had not looked for with all his acumen; he had not dreamed of such a finale, and now that the man was gone and might vanish forever, he was at a loss to know just what to think.

If Theron had remained longer he might have revealed the secret which he carried, but he had walked out and down upon the street and the man of trails was alone again.

Jasper thought of the shipping in the harbor, of the vessel which on the following day would sail for the Caribbees.

Would the man go back to her and engage passage? Would he desert Jorroek and leave him to fight the battle out with Violet and the man-hunters of New York.

"He will not do this after the story he has told me," said Jasper. "Theron will remain on the ground and in the game. If, as he says, Miles Maccoon did not die by the hand of the Trinidad Brotherhood, why should he flee?"

The detective followed Theron to the street, but he saw nothing of the strange man.

Once more he went to Minon's home and the girl admitted him, late as it was.

"Leave me alone in the library a while," said the ferret and Minon conducted him to the room.

Once more he was alone in the place where the mysterious crime had been committed. He stood in the chamber which if the walls could speak might solve the puzzle that irritated him more than ever since Theron's narrative.

He had locked the door against all intrusion and now he went to work.

He had been there before; had searched the room more than once, and it had not rewarded him.

But now with the story told by the man from Trinidad ringing in his ears he turned over the last stone as it were.

Nickum Nox had confessed to being there that night of the crime.

The old chemist had told him that he had been secreted in the secret closet from which he witnessed the murder, and that he had gone to the house for the purpose of removing from Miles Maccoon's back the branded 'D.'

The detective found the button in the wall and pressing it opened the door.

He entered the closet and shut the door behind him.

The little room was dark and suffocating; he could hardly breathe.

He turned to the door and though the light was turned on, he could not see a ray in the room.

Strain his eyes as he might, he could not make out a solitary thing and he exhausted all his endeavors to do so.

If he could not see into the library from the dark recesses of the closet how had Nickum Nox witnessed the death of Miles Maccoon?

Jasper Joyce stepped from the place with a singular light in his eyes.

He went over to the desk and opened it.

As he did so he was startled by a light rap at the door and he turned to see what Minon wanted.

The girl came in pale and trembling.

"If you are through I would like to talk," said she. "I have discovered something," she added.

She took a chair and looked up into the ferret's face.

"A very strange thing has happened," continued Minon. "This house is either haunted or some one was here to-night, awhile before you came!"

"Tell me all, Minon."

"There is not much to tell. I heard a noise when I was up-stairs and thought that Amy, the maid, who comes during the day and leaves at sundown had come back. At first I did not go down, but after awhile I descended."

"While on the stairs I looked over the transom into this room and a man was standing at this desk. I was startled and with difficulty kept back the cry that struggled to my lips. You may imagine how I felt looking down upon the man at the desk. He was standing at that corner just like a statue and for some time he did not move."

"At last he turned and opened the desk. His hand rummaged through it and took out a lot of papers such as you may have seen there to-night. I have never assorted them since the tragedy, for they seem to be nothing but bits of writing of no consequence as you told me after your first visit. But this man, if he were flesh and blood, gathered up a number of these pieces and thrust them into his pocket. I saw it all with my heart in my throat, for when he turned away he seemed to vanish at you wall."

"I remained on the steps for some time wondering what meant this strange, ghostly visit and who he could be; and when I descended I own that I was still in a quiver pardonable under the circumstances, I think."

Minon pointed toward the concealed door and Jasper Joyce looked in that direction, but saw nothing.

"Ghost or man, he was seen by me as plainly as ever I saw any one in this room."

"What was he like?"

"He was not very tall, but his shoulders were broad. He looked like a man of sixty, and his dark face was smooth. Gray hair was thick on his head, and struggled out from beneath his hat. His hands were large and as dark as his face; and his step when he walked was as agile as that of a man not past forty."

"His garments, Minon?"

"They were dark, too, and fitted him not very well. They seemed a size too large for the frame; they hung loosely on his person and the sleeves were long and half-covered the hands."

The detective listened to the girl's description of the apparition and said:

"You have searched the desk since, have you?"

"I looked into it. I thought that perhaps I could discover just what he had taken; but he seems to have carried off nothing but a lot of scraps left there by Gorell Grimm."

"We will look together," said Jasper, lifting the lid of the desk. "We will take a look and see if anything escaped your eye."

But the search was a vain one. Nothing rewarded the searchers, and as the ferret closed the desk, his eyes met Minon's.

"Did you wait for the man to come back?" he asked.

"I waited. I watched the wall, but he did not return."

"You know where the door is, girl?"

"What door?"

"The one in the wall yonder."

Minon started.

Jasper rose and touched the secret button, then turned to the girl with a smile.

"I never knew that before," cried Minon, as she sprang up and stared at the door. "I have never dreamed of such a thing as that in this house."

"That was one of Gorell Grimm's secrets?"

"It must have been—one which he kept from me."

She came over to where the detective stood and looked with a shudder into the dark place.

"He vanished hereabouts, perhaps through this very door," said she.

"Let us see."

Jasper lit a small reading lamp, and carried it into the closet; they closed the door and began to look for a clue to the man's disappearance.

The detective scoured the walls and all at once fell back with a look at Minon.

Another door, very narrow, had opened, and the girl was looking into a small room.

"You see the trail," she cried. "He must have gone out this way, and if he did, it was no ghost I saw."

Jasper plunged into the place and went on. He brought up against a wall in which another door stood well revealed, and he opened it with an air of triumph. They stood in the main hallway of the house.

"I see! He knew the secret place!" said Minon. "He must have been a man who shared Gorell Grimm's secrets."

"Recall for a moment the events of the night of the first tragedy—the death of your benefactor. You saw the man in the hall while you were fascinated on the staircase. He went out the first door?"

"Yes, boldly out."

"You recall no other person in the house that night?"

"I do not."

"Do you know that a man has confessed to being here?"

"That night?"

"Yes."

Minon shook her head.

"Well, one has. He has told me that he saw something of the crime; that he was in the secret closet while it was committed."

"Who is he?" exclaimed the girl, losing color. "What manner of man is this who confesses to that?"

Jasper smiled.

"Another question, Minon. Recall the night of Gaspard Marks's death by the dagger. You saw no one in the house that time?"

"No one."

"Nor heard a noise?"

"I heard none, though I am not a very sound sleeper. I begin to see what you are after. You think that the same hand did both deeds."

"Not that," smiled the detective. "No, not that, girl. The two persons may have known of the secret way which we have used to-night. I don't believe that the same hand committed both crimes."

There was no reply.

"But the man?" cried Minon, after a minute's silence. "The man who confessed to having been in the house the night of Gorell Grimm's death? What brought him hither? Murder?"

"He came by appointment, he says. He was to relieve Gorell of a troublesome mark."

"The one on his shoulder? Was it like the mark you found on Gaspard's back?"

"The exact counterpart of it."

"It grows deeper and deeper, doesn't it, Jasper?" said the girl, looking him in the face. "You thought you had a clue when you found the papers which you brought out by the aid of the magic chemicals; but now—now the clue seems to have vanished. The lane does not turn for you."

Jasper Joyce took the white band that hung at Minon's side and lifted it in the soft light.

"It will turn for me soon now," said he. "I am going to get at the bottom of the mysteries, and then, Minon—then—"

He leaned forward and kissed her, and Minon, falling back with a blush, let him retain her hand, while he looked into her face with all the ardor of a lover.

The door that closed on Jasper Joyce left him on the outside steps of the house on Eighth avenue.

His face was a study while he thought a moment before he moved away, and when he walked down the pavement with his Sphinx-like countenance, revealing nothing to those whom he met, he showed by no outward sign that a new revelation had dawned for the Gotham Javert, or that he was about to step upon another trail which might reward him.

"Man or ghost, I will know," was all he said. Half an hour later he was back in his "den," looking at a note which lay folded on his table.

CHAPTER XXX.

STILL AT WORK.

THE Gotham Javert read the brief note twice before he looked up.

"I have waited for you half an hour and I can't wait longer," it said. "You will excuse

me; but I must go. If you will come to No. 899 O—street at once I will try to show you something that may be of service to you.

"CHATTERS."

Always willing to listen to the shrewd boy spy who had given him more than one good bit of information in times past, the Night-Hawk put the note into his pocket and hurried away.

O—street was a good long walk, but the tireless detective did not pause till he got at the door of 899, and in a minute he was inside.

It had been Chatters's home for some time and while he was not the sole tenant of the house, the ferret knew where to look for him.

He opened a door on the third floor, back, and stood in a room dark and not very fragrant.

A figure sprang up from one corner as he shut the door and Chatters stood before him.

"I have located Violet again," he said. "I can tell you where she is at this very moment."

"Which is one of the things I want to know," was the reply.

Chatters stood before the detective, comical in his scanty dress, and his black eyes fairly twinkled.

"I saw her enter No. — Cedar street to-night, and she did not come out though I waited some time."

"That is a strange street for Violet to reside on."

"Perhaps. But she entered that house. I could not be mistaken."

"Is that all, Chatters?"

"All with the exception that Nickum Nox has moved."

This was not news to the detective and he told Chatters that he had seen the old man since his sudden flight.

"You can go back to bed now, Chatters."

"You are going out to find Violet?"

"Perhaps."

"You intend to let her know that she can't play longer the game she has played, eh?"

"Yes."

"Success, Jasper. We are getting there. We will soon stand at the end of the long lane, and then there will be another feather in our caps."

With this the detective went out and Chatters returned to his cot.

"Cedar street?" muttered the Javert, as he hastened through the lamplight. "Truly a strange place for the woman of vengeance. But she may have turned Zira again and be in hiding from the men whom, as Violet, she hunts oath-bound, and with all the eagerness of a cheetah."

Number 899 was far behind him when he stood in front of the house on Cedar street.

Jasper wondered how Violet would greet him and he smiled when he mounted the step and pulled the bell.

It was a small house, two-story, and so far as he could see it gave out no signs of being tenanted at all.

He rung the second time and his summons was unanswered still.

Then he turned the knob and saw the door open.

"Violet is careless," said he as he stepped into the place. "She does not lock her doors, which is very strange for a woman who is in the shadow. Violet is a strange creature anyhow, and while she hunts she should watch the corners, and see that the hand of vengeance does not turn upon her."

He stopped in the hall and looked ahead. The only light that came in came from the nearest street lamp and it afforded but little satisfaction to the ferret.

Jasper went forward and found a door. He opened it, for it was unlocked like the first one, and in a moment he stood in a small poorly furnished room with a low ceiling.

As yet no signs of Violet.

Could Chatters have been mistaken? Could he have allowed the shrewd woman to outwit him in this manner, leaving him to believe that she lived there for the purpose of throwing him off his guard?

The Countess was capable of playing just such a hand.

The detective was not going away without a thorough search of the house.

He searched the lower rooms, but found nothing.

On the stairway he stopped, however.

There were several dark stains on the naked steps as he could see by the light which he carried.

He stooped and examined them.

On the fifth step they ceased, and he saw no more of them, but he had seen enough to believe that they were blood stains.

Was he on the threshold of another discovery?

Jasper Joyce went up-stairs and found a door near the silent landing.

It was tightly closed and seemed to be keeping out by this means some mystery that lay beyond.

"We'll see," said the ferret, and he opened the door and held his light inside.

The first thing he saw confirmed his suspicions.

The room contained a bed and a table at which stood two chairs close together.

On the bed lay the body of a dead man, face downward!

It did not take the detective long to cross to where the man lay, and he held the light closer to discover that the side of the face was dark and framed in a black beard, soft and glossy.

Jasper set the light down and turned the body face upward.

It was Theron!

"Found at last!" said the Night-Hawk, as he gazed at the face rigid in death. "He did not get to breathe long after he told his strange story and now all the ships can sail without him."

Jasper looked for some time at the handsome face of the man from Trinidad.

Found at last! It was true. Chatters may have seen Violet enter the old house and have watched in vain for her coming out.

She must have known that Theron was there. She must have been on the trail of the victim; and having delivered the blow, she must have outwaited Chatters, or left the house by another way.

And now the only one left was Jorrock—Jorrock the head of the Brotherhood, the last man of the avenging triad from the Caribbees.

Jasper wondered if he was to let this cool woman, this mad creature, baffle him all the time. He asked himself if he had to let Violet rob him of a detective's triumph; if he was doomed to reach the end of the trail with nothing to tell but this avenger's work!

It maddened the man-hunter of Gotham.

"This must cease," he cried aloud. "This woman must stop her mad work and stop it now. The next victim will be Jorrock and that will end my work ingloriously."

He looked for the signs of death which were present when the body of Gaspard or Pasca was found; but they were not there.

There was no dagger with the crimson setting, and no ghastly surroundings such as had been found with the other crime.

The assassin had simply come and gone. There was nothing to tell that the strong man had resisted; nothing to show that he had struggled for his life.

This time there was no table overturned, and Chatters could not tell the story of Violet and Theron.

Jasper Joyce turned from the scene with his footsteps sounding solemnly on the floor.

He left Theron handsome still, but with the white rigid face of the dead, and stole away.

Violet must stay her mad hand. She had struck often enough and Jasper, the ferret, was resolved that she must cease.

With the secret of the new crime in his heart, he went out and up the street almost deserted.

"Now for the old man's," said he as he hastened away. "I may find him in the new home where I left him, and he shall tell me something, or I will know why his lips are sealed."

It was a long run to the new abode of Nickum Nox, the Magic Chemist.

The detective ran up the stairs and stopped at the old man's door. It was opened at his knock and Nickum appeared with a frightened face.

He evidently thought that he was rid of Jasper for some time.

As the ferret entered the room the old chemist stepped to the table and hastily caught up something in his hand.

It was small, and his dark fingers closed on it instantly and Jasper could not see what it was.

"You are a regular night-owl," said Nickum, eying the detective closely as he stopped at the table and looked at him in turn.

"You know what I am," was the reply.

"You never let up when on the trail."

"To do that is to lose the quarry."

"Just so. It is to drop the threads of the skein, eh?"

"You are right, Nickum."

"You want to see me?"

"That's why I'm here."

The old man folded his arms and smiled as he replied that he was at the detective's service.

"There's but one now," said Jasper.

There was a start on the old man's part and he seemed to fall back a step.

"But one?" he cried. "When did it happen?"

"Not long ago."

"Was it Jorrock?"

"It was Theron."

"Where is the body?"

"I can show you if you will go with me."

"Go with you to look at a dead man?" cried Nickum Nox. "Not just now, Jasper."

He shrugged his shoulders as he spoke and a grin came to his leathery face and remained a moment there.

"Did you ever know that Theron was an artist?" queried Jasper.

"If you will come to my room I will show you what he drew for me on my wall."

"I knew that Theron—"

The old fellow checked himself.

"Ah, you knew that he could draw—that he could handle the pencil as well as the best of them! He drew a strange landscape for me—on my wall."

"An odd place for a picture?" said the Magic Chemist.

"You should see it, Nickum."

"Why?"

Jasper seemed to bend forward and for half a second he watched the face of the man in the chair.

"The brothers were strange men," said he. "They came to this city for revenge. They came oath-bound from the shades of Trinidad, and not long ago they renewed the oath, touching the brand on each other's back, and swearing to hunt down the hand which killed Pasca. You knew something of their grit. You knew that they were men of nerve, though Theron tried in a moment of fright to have the 'D' removed. Now it is a fight between Jorrock and the huntress."

There was no reply. Nickum Nox, still covering what he had picked up from the table, looked at the detective and kept silent.

"They tell me," Jasper suddenly resumed, that the 'D' is to be seen on more backs than the keenest suspect. It was, after all, a far-reaching Order. There was a member of it who vanished suddenly from Trinidad. There is a person known as the 'lost brother'—a man who, on account of domestic difficulties, fled from the island, and who has buried his identity with some success."

"Where do you get all this?" asked Nickum.

"Minon found an old diary kept at one time by Gorell Grimm, or Miles Maccoon. The pages are covered with writing, but the chemicals which you gave me bring out on those same pages the story of the missing brother. Once a member of the Dastard D's always in the fold and bound to carry out all its code."

The last sentence had barely left the detective's lips when the old man sprang up with the suddenness of a tiger.

He cleared the space between them, and as Jasper rose he was seized by the throat, and, despite his strength, was hustled across the room and pinned to the wall by the long fingers of a man whose eyes blazed like mad stones.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AT THE SECRET'S THRESHOLD.

SUCH treatment at the hands of Nickum Nox was the last thing the Gotham ferret would have thought of a short time before he received it; but with the old man at his throat and his frame in a quiver, he saw that there was method in his rage.

Jasper Joyce had the strength of a lion, but he discovered that the Magic Chemist was endowed with powers almost equal to his, and he was prevented from getting away by the hands that held him against the wall.

"What is that you were saying?" cried Nox, as he caught second wind, but did not loosen his desperate hold. "What brought you to my house? You have been back on the old trail. Why don't you go out and hunt down the woman with the dagger?"

Jasper managed to throw the old man aside for a moment, and the next second he caught up one of the heavy chairs and held it over Nickum's head.

"I was telling you," said Jasper, as he looked the man in the eye, "that once a member of the Brotherhood, always one. You know that, Nickum Nox."

"It is false!"

"Open your garments and pull your shirt down over your shoulders. Let me get a look at your skin between the shoulder-blades. That will settle the matter."

"You shall see nothing of the kind."

"Very well. You shall be looked at by others by and by."

Nickum Nox opened one of his hands and disclosed there a bit of rolled paper which he had taken from the table.

"You are shrewd, Jasper. You have been on the trail of the two mysteries, and they appear to you near their solution. But let me talk calmly. We should be friends."

"That is true."

The old man went back to the table and sat down.

"You were telling me about the picture which Theron drew on your wall. I would like to see it."

"When?"

"Now."

"You shall see it."

Nickum Nox picked up his hat.

"We will go. We will walk, for no one will be at our heels, and I am quite sure that Theron will not follow us, ha, ha!"

Looking at the old man, Jasper went down the stairs with him and they descended to the street.

"Here we are," said Nox as the detective unlocked his door and admitted them. "It does me good to come to this room, for here you have thought out more than one dark puzzle, Jasper."

He waited for the ferret to turn on the gas and as the light flashed up he looked at Jasper Joyce.

"There it is," said the detective. "You can see what the hand of Theron did."

Nickum started a little when he saw the outlines of the tropical landscape and all at once he walked a little closer and stopped.

"It is a pretty picture," said he, muttering to himself and without taking notice of the man who looked on. "Theron drew from memory, but he drew well. Yonder are the trees and there the open sea. Behind those hills back from the coast lies a little valley—the Valley of Sorrow they call it—pretty, but dreaded by all who cross it. Death lurks there, Jasper—death in more forms than one. Why did Theron leave that on your wall?"

"He first drew it and then told me the story of the Brotherhood."

"All of it?"

"Nearly all. It was a strange story, and, of course, I listened. Theron may have left out a few points, but I have picked them up elsewhere."

"You have?"

"Why not?"

With another look at the drawing, Nickum Nox walked toward the door and suddenly avoided the hand outstretched to detain him.

"Stand where you are, Jasper," said he. "You are close enough. I have looked at Theron's picture and I will now depart."

"When I say so, I will not let you go out."

"You will not, you say? That is not very clever in you, Jasper. But I am going."

The old man reached the door and opened it. He suddenly threw up one hand and covered the detective with the dark finger.

"One step and you will quit the trail forever!" he said, half under his breath. "One word and Jasper Joyce, detective that he is, will fall dead where he lives. I am more than Nickum Nox. I am a man at whose command lie all the secret agents of death. I am a man who can speak and kill—the avenger of the broken oath and the hunter of the traitor!"

"I believe that now, Nickum," said the detective. "I know now that you were in the house of the murder on the night of the crime. You have confessed to this; but I have other proof. You have been there since. You came and went by the secret way; you vanished through the door in the wall, and the last time you were there you cleared the desk of bits of paper which may be of importance to you and you alone."

"Never mind all this. You will not touch me, Jasper Joyce. You will stand where you are and let me pass from your room for the last time."

The old chemist stepped into the hall and looked back but once.

His face was white and his hands hanging at his sides were clinched.

The detective saw him depart, and while he stood in the middle of the room he heard his feet on the stairway and lost the sound as he listened.

It was like the escape of a rat from a trap after being caught.

Jasper Joyce sprung to the door and thence into the hall.

He leaned over the landing and caught sight of a figure there. It seemed to have stopped midway down the flight and was looking back at him.

That it was Nickum Nox he did not doubt, and the next moment he went toward it two steps at a time.

"What is the matter?" said a voice so entirely strange to Jasper that he paused and looked.

The speaker was not Nickum Nox, and the face as he saw it in the light that prevailed was not that of the old chemist.

The man on the middle stairway leaned against the wall and made way for Jasper to descend.

"Have you had an adventure?" he asked as Jasper came on again.

"Did you see any one?"

"A man? Yes, sir; he nearly knocked me against the wall as he tore down the flight. A push, but no apology; that's what I got. You want him, do you?"

Jasper bounded on.

The street below was entirely destitute of pedestrians and he looked in vain for the familiar figure of Nickum Nox.

The old man had vanished!

"Jasper Joyce, you have been hoodwinked by the old wretch," he said with a smile, as he went back. "The next time there will be no such playing."

Slowly the Javert went back and entered his room again.

He saw nothing of the man whom he had met on the stairway, but suddenly recalled him as he closed his door.

The picture left on his wall by Theron had vanished, and as he approached he could see that some hand had rubbed it out by a sudden effort.

But if it had disappeared something had been left in place of it and, as the detective paused in front of the wall, he read the one sentence which had been scrawled across it by some hand:

"The fool and the detective are near of kin!"

That meant him, and it was gall to Joyce to read the contemptuous inscription.

Some one had come back; Nickum Nox, the man of magic, must have been the person encountered on the staircase; he had deceived the city sharp, and while that worthy was looking for him on the street below, he had stolen to the room to obliterate Theron's drawing and to leave in its place the aggravating sentence which he had just read.

No wonder the Gotham Javert scoriated the old man.

For a minute, during which time the detective reread the sentence, there was silence in the little room.

"The tables shall be turned, Nickum!" he cried. "The skein shall be unwound and the guilty punished. Theron said it was not the hand of Jorrock, nor of Pasca, nor of Theron. Theron knew."

Jasper immediately locked his door but it was on the outside.

He turned toward the steps again and went down to the street. There was a singular light in the eyes of the crime-hunter. He looked at his watch as he started off.

"I am almost willing to decide by the toss of a copper which one I shall visit," said he, and his hand brought up from his pocket a coin as he stopped in the lower hall with the light of a street lamp on the floor.

"Heads, Jorrock, tails, Violet," he said as he tossed the coin toward the ceiling.

As the piece of money struck the floor the detective watched it roll till it settled.

"Jorrock!" said he as rose with the coin in his hand.

Half a minute later he was in the street and his feet were pacing toward the river.

The toss of a coin might decide a momentous question; it might determine the length of a human life.

The Night-Hawk hastened on and felt that he was nearing a turn in the lane of guilt.

He drew up in front of a house, and suddenly stepped aside as the door opened.

The figure that appeared on the step was clutched by the detective's hand, and there was a cry and a start.

"Not so fast," said Jasper as he dragged the person in his clutches back into the house. "You will not get away till I have seen whom you have left in this house."

At the same time he raised a veil that covered the woman's face, and the lamp revealed the white lips and gleaming eyes of the Countess Violet.

"I have seen the other one," continued Jasper. "You have thus far played a sure and a deadly hand. Let us go back and look at Jorrock."

"Jorrock?" said Violet. "He is not here."

"Not in this house?" said Jasper. "You have left him as you left Theron in the other place. You knew where to find Jorrock, for you have lived for this."

"Jorrock, I tell you, is not here!"

"It is his house, at any rate."

"You are right. This is the home of Jorrock of Trinidad—Jorrock, the man who headed the Brotherhood which hunted down Miles Maccoon, my brother. You want to see him, do you?"

"Yes. In which room will we find him, Zira?"

"You won't believe me. He is not here." Still with all this asseveration, the detective looked incredulous.

"Come, then, let me show you," said Zira. "We will see the single tenant of this place."

She hastened down the hall and threw wide a door.

"Behold her!" cried Zira, as she drew back, and with quivering finger covered a young girl lying in a chair, her eyes wide open and her face ghastly.

"It is Phera!" cried the detective. "It is, Phera, the gifted girl who was silenced by the hand of Jorrock!"

"You would not believe me," said Zira, looking on.

Jasper went forward and took the girl's hand, and at his touch she started.

"She is not dead," he cried. "You did not get to finish her, woman."

"I did not intend to kill her. I hid her here—hid her from Jorrock. I have been coming here ever since her flight from the other place. Jasper Joyce, I have struck twice, when perhaps I should have held back my hand. You have heard of the missing member of the Brotherhood? I have at last found him after finishing Pasca and Theron. Now, let me go to turn on Nickum Nox!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE SCRAWL ON THE PILLOW.

THE next day at an hour which might be called early a man might have been seen pacing a room in which there was not much furniture of any kind.

His garments did not fit him very well; his face was dark and his fingers large and bony.

He was hatless and his feet which were incased in slippers made but little noise on the floor.

A little light stole in at the window and fell upon the floor here and there and the man in the room, which looked out upon a lot of poor buildings, seemed to be laboring under intense excitement.

He had paced the floor for an hour, with scarcely a moment's cessation, now and then lifting his head and looking out of the window with an eager glance born of hope.

"He ought to come if he is coming at all," he said, aloud. "I can't wait for him all the time. Eternity will be here by and by and this man must not keep me waiting too long."

He went to the window and stood there a little while. He could see the tall masts of shipping where the piers were, but they seemed far across the city, and the morning sunlight fell on the top masts of the large schooners.

"I have waited long enough," he exclaimed, falling back from the sight. "I will not wait another moment. He will not come and so he loses the game."

He took a seat at the table and pulled a little mirror from his pocket. Placing it against a water pitcher he next took a wooden box from the drawer and selected brushes and paints from it.

Then he fell to painting his eyebrows by looking into the piece of glass, after which he drew lines on his forehead with the brushes, and lines about the mouth.

He kept this up for some time, or until he had transformed himself and looked like another person.

All this work occupied an hour. He labored diligently and put the paint where it seemed to suit his purpose, and when he rose he looked at his hands and smiled.

"Now, Jasper, my Night-Hawk friend, you can come," he said. "You can play out the game and net Jorrock, if Violet spares him. You can take a peep into this room, but you won't find Nickum Nox here; not even if I remain to confront you."

The speaker flung the mirror into the grate where it was shattered and went to the door. In another moment he went out as unconsciously as though he was an every-day tenant whose coming and going was no event at all.

Down on the street with no hand-bag and no luggage at all, he paced along, brushing people at every step, and looking now and then into the faces he met.

Thanks to the paints, he was safe at last.

"I would like to run up and see her before I go," he thought. "But I might play the fool, for she is pretty, and, then, I can't stand everything. No, I will let her be. She knows nothing yet; she is still in the dark and I don't believe Jasper Joyce will ever tell her. He will love her too well for that, I trust."

The old man made his way toward the shipping. He stood on one of the piers and watched them load a ship soon to put off. A strange looking flag was flying underneath the Stars and Stripes, and as he watched the men working like beavers, he smiled.

He must have been there before, for he went on board the vessel and caught the captain on deck.

"You have come, I see," said the officer. "We will get off by and by. If you care to go to your room, you are at liberty to do so."

"Will we get away in an hour?"

"Perhaps not in two; the loading is slow this time."

The passenger turned and walked the plank back to the dock.

Here he kept on until he reached the street where he looked at his watch again.

"I have two hours!" said he. "Why not go up and laugh at the woman! I can hold her at arm's length and she will be made harmless. I know where to find her."

He got into the first cab he could hail and was off. He gave his orders in cool tones and then settled back in the seat.

"I will show her that she played a deadly hand all for nothing. I am the missing member of the Brotherhood. I am Novan, the man who vanished from Trinidad after the trouble with my wife, and when I came to America with my child who was stolen from me while I was in the hospital by Miles Maccoon, I became Nickum Nox, a role which I could play, thanks to what I had learned of chemistry. They never found me out till late—till they could not play against the hand I held."

"Well, in a little while I will be on the high seas. I will be Novan again, and back in the tropics I will be safe from the vengeance of Violet and Jorrock. And better still the detective will not know where to look for me."

The cab rattled on and at last seemed to go very slow.

"The ship will leave without me if this snail's pace is kept up," cried the man inside. "What is the matter with the cabman? Is he drunk?"

The man on the box was nothing else, as was discovered the following moment when a collision started the passengers and nearly threw him through the door.

He shouted to the driver; he cursed him

right and left until the cab lurched forward and the horses were running at full speed.

"Satan take the idiot!" cried Nickum Nox, throwing open the door and looking out.

It was a mad dash to death, nothing more.

The infuriated horses were running at full speed, and the cab in turning a corner was thrown to one side and the wheels snapped under the strain.

The old chemist saw his peril and jumped. He saw that in another moment they were apt to land against a telegraph pole, and jumping seemed to be the only hope.

In an instant the collision came. It happened as the falling man, with his feet entangled in the rug on the floor of the vehicle, landed on the stones and he was turned over and over to the horror of fifty people.

It did not take long for the spectators to remove the man from the mass of wreckage that cumbered the avenue.

They picked him up and carried him to the sidewalk; they looked at his face and none knew who he was; no one could see in the painted features the face of Nickum Nox, the Magic Chemist.

When the old man came to he was being rattled over the streets of New York again, but this time he was not the victim of a runaway team.

He looked at the faces once above him and then shut his eyes. He was in the ambulance.

Then everything came back to him; the visit to the ship, the desire to go back and face Violet, the avenger, and the mad horses and the futile leap for life.

He was carried to the hospital and placed on the surgeon's table.

A broken leg, a bruised shoulder.

"Look," said one of the younger surgeons, suddenly, pointing to something on the man's back. "Here is a letter 'D' like that which was found on the body of two men who met with violent deaths recently—Gorell Grimm and his servant Gaspard."

It was true. On the back of his patient and at a place where his hand could not interfere, was the branded "D" of the Trinidad Brotherhood.

The man who heard these words with his teeth clinched writhed, but made no answer.

One of the surgeons left the room and entered a little office in the building.

When he came back to the patient there was a smile of satisfaction on the surgeon's face, and he went to work on the man.

An hour waned. The victim of the runaway, bandaged on the couch, lay with stern face which had been washed, changing it very much, for it removed the paint, and seemed to be thinking of the failure he had made.

He looked up at his nurse and saw that he was not watching him closely.

"I'll never get to face her," he said. "I won't get to tell Violet about my work though she may guess it after she sees the detective. I am not going back to Trinidad. I shall remain here."

He knew that life was ending for him. He could feel in his body the ebbing of the tide which had kept him up so long.

All at once he began to move his hand toward a pencil, the tip of which was to be seen out of the sleeping nurse's pocket.

In another moment he was writing slowly on the clean white pillow.

Every now and then he stopped and rested. He knew that he was near the end.

At last he dropped the pencil and looked back at the nurse; he attempted to restore the lead and did so with an effort.

"There! That's the last thing I will ever write. Novan, you have played out your hand!"

For a moment he looked at the ceiling and then fell back again on the pillow.

Five minutes later three men came down the narrow aisle, and bent their steps toward the man on the cot.

He appeared to be asleep.

"That is the man," said one of the three. "That is—"

He left the name unsaid for he quickened his steps and suddenly bent over Nickum Nox.

"I have come too late. This man is dead?"

"Dead?" said the nurse with a start. "Oh, no, sir. That can't be. He was alive a little while ago—"

"But, look at that face."

The nurse nodded.

"He has met his God!" he said solemnly.

Joyce bent over the dead face and seemed to study it for a moment.

"What is that on the pillow?" asked one of the attendants.

"Where?"

"Under his head."

The detective lifted his head and pulled the pillow out. He carried it across the ward to the window and read what was written there with the eagerness of a practiced man-hunter.

"This was intended for me," he said, coming back as he stripped the pillow and held the white casing in his hand. "You will let me have this, doctor?"

"If it furthers the interests of justice."

"It does more than that. It solves a terrible mystery."

Dead on the narrow cot of the hospital lay the man who was to have sailed for Trinidad, and back over the stones of Gotham rode another person, with a pillow slip in his bosom.

On a certain table he spread it out and with a bright looking boy beside him, he read the scrawl which the now dead hand had written there.

It was the real story of the murder of Gorell Grimm, or Miles Maccoon, told, it is true, in disconnected sentences but terribly told just the same.

"Would you have thought that, Jasper?" asked Chatters, looking up.

"No one, boy, till it was almost forced upon him. We strike the wrong clue sometimes and the right one comes to us like the revelation of a dream. When Minon told me, after Nickum Nox's confession, that he often was in the house nights; that Grimm was killed by the poisoned pin; that she saw an old man in the library and that he then vanished, as it were, into the solid wall, I turned to him. Then you recollect that Theron said that it was not the hand of Jorrock, nor Pasca's nor his own; but the hand of another."

"He meant Nickum Nox's, eh?"

"Yes. That old man wore the brand of the Dastard D's. He carried out the oath of the Brotherhood: after long years he simply found Miles Maccoon, the traitor, and finished him!"

"But, what of Violet now?"

"We will find her."

"And Jorrock, the last of the D's?"

"We will find him, too."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AT THE END OF THE SKEIN.

THE Gotham Javert knew that the lane had turned and that he had reached the end of the mystery of Eighth avenue.

His declaration to Chatters that he would find both Jorrock and Violet, or Zira, he intended to make good. He knew that the tigress from the Caribbees had settled with both Pasca and Theron, believing that they had had a hand in the death of Miles Maccoon; and he now saw that she had struck the wrong persons, though at the same time, these men deserved a severe lesson for their evil deeds.

It was a vendetta such as this experienced detective had never seen in this country, and when he walked from his room with Chatters, to separate from him on the street, he resolved not to recross its step until he had carried out his intentions.

At the same time a man stood before a glass in a small room with a bit of soap in a cup and a brush in his hand.

Tall and handsome he looked, as his face was reflected in the mirror, and in a little while strips of black beard fell upon the paper he had placed on the table.

It was getting dark, but the light was sufficient for him to see what he was about, and he continued to shave with hands that did not tremble.

Listening at the door for some movement which would tell her that the room beyond was inhabited, stood a woman in black, with a pair of gloved hands resting on the lintel.

Her face, ghastly white, was glued to the door and her bosom scarcely moved as she seemed to hold her breath.

She was Zira!

Something that seemed to catch even the faint light that straggled to the spot where she stood was gripped in her hand and she never moved a muscle while she waited.

She had not tried the door, but appeared to realize that it was locked, yet she knew that the crisis had come and the last quarry run down!

She had found Pasca and Theron; she had hunted Jorrock, time and again; now there was but a panel between her and the man!

Unsuspecting of her deadly presence, Jorrock shaved on, sacrificing the beautiful beard, but for a terrible purpose.

Not that he feared her, for Jorrock felt no fear. He had no such spells which had, at times overtaken and made a coward of Theron; he had faced death before in many forms and even if he had known that Zira stood at the door with the dagger, he would have completed his job.

When he had lost his beard Jorrock wiped his razor and replaced it on its shelf.

Then he looked at himself and smiled.

"All for you, my pretty tigress," said he.

"All for you. In this garb, perhaps, you will not know me until it is too late. Then you can look me in the face and know that the third man and the last one was more dangerous than all the rest."

Zira drew back when she heard footsteps on the floor beyond the door.

"He will come out pretty soon," she said, half audibly. "Then, my last one—then, Zira will let you see the face of the Destroyer!"

The head of a man appeared at the top of the stairs, and Zira turned as if she had seen a specter. Then fell back against the wall, raised her hand, and with her gloved knuckles she fell against the door, and struck it madly.

She knew the man at the top of the stairs; but he was yet several feet away.

Jorrock might open the door first; that is what she hoped for.

In response to her knocks Jorrock sprung forward and turned the key in the lock.

Zira's white face flushed.

"Time enough yet," she must have thought.

The Night-Hawk Detective saw her nerve and also noted what her fingers gripped.

Instantly he realized the whole game. He sprung forward, but at that moment the door opened.

Zira poised before the door, saw the smooth-faced man who stood there and recoiled.

The black beard was gone; Jorrock had transformed himself into a sybarite.

With a cry that told her disappointment, Zira struggled in the detective's clutches; but, when Jorrock, looking at her, spoke to the Javert, she recognized the voice.

She tried to get at the man from the Caribbees.

"He is the last one—the last of the three!" she cried. "Give me a second of liberty—just one second! Then you can have him. This is Jorrock, the one I had saved for the last. Let me teach him that vengeance never sleeps. I am Violet now, and Zira has vanished forever!"

A grim smile lit up Jorrock's smooth face as he leaned toward the woman and his hand suddenly covered her.

"Know, serpent of the Caribbees, that my hands are not guilty of shedding the blood of Miles Maccoon, the traitor. I went to the house for that purpose, but he was dead when I reached him—killed by a poisoned needle such as I carried that night for that very deed."

"It is false!"

"It is true, Zira," assured the detective. "The man who really killed Miles Maccoon lies dead at the hospital."

"His name?"

"He had two. One was Norvan—"

"Norvan, the missing member of the Brotherhood!"

"Some men called him Nickum Nox, the Magic Chemist."

A smile crossed Jorrock's face and he looked at the detective.

"Here I am," said he. "You are the man of the trail. I am Jorrock—Jorrock of the Brotherhood of the Caribbee. The traitor is dead—killed by Norvan, the missing member of the League. And that woman is the sister of the dead, and the avenger of the traitor who perished in New York for crimes committed in the Caribbees."

It is six months after these events.

Some one has picked up in the harbor the body of a man that has been buffeted by wind and wave until almost unrecognizable.

It has been taken to the Morgue and to a certain man who comes to look at it it has an identity that startles him.

In the faint light, for it is near evening, he bends over the loathsome thing and looks at the shoulders.

Something appears there—something that draws a smile to this man's lips, and with another look he turns away.

"Jorrock!" he murmurs. "Dead at last, but not by the hand of the woman. This is a mystery which no one need solve. Bereft of the companionship of Pasca and Theron, and driven to despair, with the Dastard 'D' on your back forever, you seek the solace of the river and the Morgue finds the last of the Brotherhood."

Jasper Joyce, the great Gotham Javert, stands at the end of the trail.

He can now devote himself to a pleasanter duty and wed the beautiful girl who crossed his path for the first time when he stood in the house of the double crime.

He has a secret which he will keep from her—the identity of Nickum Nox, so far as goes his relationship to her, the stolen child of the Caribbees.

As for Violet, she has escaped from prison and with Phera, her own offspring, is somewhere in the world, perhaps among the groves of Trinidad, living over the days of her double life and terrible revenge.

Minon has received some of the diamonds back, and has kept her promise to her detective husband not to ask him where he got them.

Chatters comes and goes, as of old; but he is no longer page to the Countess Violet, and Jasper Joyce, the Night-Hawk Detective, has long since rewarded him for his part in the drama we have watched from first to last—the doom of the Dastard D's.

THE END.

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